

The B-List: 6/28

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It's hard to tell which event was most unlikely yesterday: that Paul Byrd would pitch five very good innings after two very poor ones, that Jason Michaels would have the game-winning blow, or that the Indians would win because their manager was significantly better than the opponent's. In today's B-List, Buff recaps the get-away 4-3 victory over Oakland, touching on some fine performances and introducing a new feature.



FINAL SCORE				
Athletics (40-38)	1	2	0	0
Indians (46-32)	0	0	0	0

W: Byrd (7-3) L: R. Flores (0-2) S: Borowski (22)

The fascinating thing about winning this series from Oakland was that a major contributing factor was that our opponent was thoroughly outmanaged. Somewhere, a disgruntled Oakland fan is writing wildly false things about Billy Beane, unless his resolve isn't any stronger than mine. (For example, "billy beane" +platypus +kidnapped returns no hits.)

1) A tale of two remarkably similar pitchers

Pitcher A (let's call him "Paul Byrd") pitched very poorly yesterday. In a stretch where other pitchers called "Paul Byrd" were frustrating fans

by giving up 2 hits an inning, this one trumped them all by giving up *three* hits an inning. In the first, Pitcher A gave up one run on a trio of singles (two of the infield variety, which I'm ready to stop seeing any time now). In the second, Pitcher A fell a triple short of the Reverse Cycle, giving up a home run, a double to the wall, and an RBI single. Through two innings, Pitcher A had a WHIP of 3.00 and an ERA of 13.50. Although he'd switched from 3 fly ball outs to 3 ground ball outs, this didn't act as any sort of predictor of success: the ground balls were hits and the fly balls outs in the first, and vice versa in the second. He threw strikes (34 in 46 pitches), but not very efficiently. There's a guy screaming to be replaced.

Ever vigilant, Eric Wedge replaced Pitcher A ("Paul Byrd") with Pitcher B (let's call him "Paul Byrd"). Pitcher B was a lot more effective, going 5 strong shutout innings, giving up three singles and a double, walking no one, and striking out two. He even induced a double play. This pitcher was even more accurate while being a lot more efficient (41 strikes in 51 pitches). In other words, Pitcher B threw fewer balls and only 5 more pitches total in FIVE innings than Pitcher A threw in TWO.

Look, raise your hand if you felt confident after Byrd's first two innings. This had double-digit runs written all over it, right? And then Byrd went sailing from the third to the seventh, allowing no more than a single baserunner in any inning, only one of whom even got into scoring position. It wasn't a dominant performance, but it was an efficient and comfortable one.

My admonition about Byrd needing to fish a little out of the zone rings awfully false, although in my defense, the A's are a team that does not fish as a general rule. Once Byrd figured this out and got into a rhythm (after going 3-0 on Jack Cust to lead off the third), Byrd threw 9 straight strikes to get three outs in the third, 9 strikes in 13 pitches in the 4th, 11 straight strikes in the 5th, 7 strikes in 8 pitches in the 6th, and 6 strikes in 8 pitches in the 7th. It's the only positive contribution I can find Cust making to the Cleveland effort over the four-game series.

It'd be hard to look someone in the eye and tell them that we have nothing to worry about with Byrd in the rotation, but that's two Quality Starts in a row ... and hey, he won the game. AS Farmer Hoggett would say, "That'll do."

2) Mike Smash!

After Kelly Shoppach got his obligatory hit in the 7th, Josh Barfield's single to right turned into a fielder's choice when Shoppach ran the bases like a 2006 Cleveland Indian. Casey Blake pinch-hit for Mineral Mike Rouse and singled to center. The left-handed reliever Randy Flores was summoned to retire Grady Sizemore, then left in to face Jason Michaels, ostensibly with an eye toward continuing on to face Martinez and Hafner.

Oops.

Jason Michaels watched a strike and two balls go by, then hit a mistake fastball ("It was supposed to be a fastball inside," said Flores) over the left-center field wall for the three-run home run that would end the scoring. Michaels is now hitting .325/.397/.532 against left-handed pitching this season, the role he had before signing with the Indians. As a wacky suggestion, I recommend that be his role here, too. (Truthfully, he's not *awful* against righties, but does sport a sub-.300 OBP, which is not what you want from either a corner outfielder or a 2-hole hitter, both of which he was yesterday.)

"I'm not a home run hitter," said Michaels. Yeah, well, you hit .325 and slug .532, you can hit whatever you damn well please, son. By the way, Michaels has an 11-game hitting streak and hits in 14 of his last 16 games, including 5 games in which he had no more that 2 at-bats (two single-trip games).

Lost in the heroics is the fact that his previous two trips ended with him making the third out with a runner in scoring position. On the other hand, given the heroics,

I'm all for losing it. (Still, it adds data to the existing set that suggests that he needs a platoon partner, preferably one with hamstrings.)

3) Should have been even better

Josh Barfield went 2-for-4, scoring two runs and stealing a pair of bases. He would have gone 3-for-4 had it not been for Shoppach's blunder (Barfield's liner just evaded Mark Ellis' glove, and Shoppach had turned his back on the play to head back to first: he was easily forced at second).

Barfield will probably be unhappy to see June end tomorrow, as he is hitting .333 with 9 runs and 10 RBI in the month. Due to a statistical oddity (and an almost two-year-old level of patience), his batting average is actually higher than his OBP because he has more sacrifices (one) than walks (fewer than one). Five of his thirty-two hits have been for (an) extra base(s), so his SLG remains relatively poor, but hey, he's a middle infielder. You've been spoiled, people.

Barfield's two steals included a steal of third and give him a nice 8:3 SB:CS ratio for the season.

4) Ho Hum Dept.

Victor Martinez had a pair of hits, both doubles, one from each side of the plate. His platoon split:

.316/.372/.532 batting left-handed
.320/.392/.544 batting right-handed

He's okay, I guess.

5) Working on your day off

I understand the principle of a Utility Infielder: the most important skill is the ability to play acceptable defense at as many infield positions as possible. If he can play both middle infield slots AND third base, there's a whole roster position you're saving not spent on a backup something-or-other, especially if the everyday players are good enough and durable enough to warrant being in the lineup the great majority of the time. With Blake manning third and Peralta at short with near-identical lines of about .275/.360/.480, and Barfield hot in June, this certainly describes the Indians. (I suppose that for sake of argument, Mike Rouse could play first base in an emergency, but we have options there: at 2B/SS/3B, the only option is Rouse.) Anything else is really a bit luxurious: if he is very good defensively, or has some pop, or runs well, these are all on *top* of the requirement, not *art* of it. p

However, Mineral Mike is really a very, very poor hitter. I mean godawful. Just sickening. In a measure of VORP, Rouse is the fourth most-damaging hitter among major-league second basemen ... and he never plays! But hey, it's some 60 plate appearances over three months, big deal.

Well, here's part of the deal: you would like to believe that the reason Rouse starts is to give a player a day off. A day off is good to recharge the batteries, give the ol' muscles a chance to heal up, not get all stretched and strained and what have you ... I mean, these are professional athletes and they're in much better shape than you and me (well, I don't know about all of you, but me, yes) and they have extraordinary pain tolerance in general, but a day off is good even for these guys.

That is, if the day off involves Actually Being **Off** for the **Day**.

Because Mineral Mike is so hideous with a bat in his hand, it's hardly usual for Rouse to end a game he starts: if he plays short, Jhonny Peralta will pinch-hit late in the game, or Blake at third, or Barfield at second ... unless the game is well out of hand one way or the other (and this team has recently shown it's hard to consider them truly out of a game), at some point Min-e-Mike is going to come to the plate when you need a hit, and thus must be replaced.

Anyway, I'm not going to whine and tell you that Casey Blake playing two innings of third and running around the bases once is going to make him a worn-out nub come October, but it's not like he actually had the day off, either. And this is hardly the first time it's happened.

There is no other option: Rivas and Luna are atrocious defenders this season, virtually blindfolded, and Inglett isn't a true option at all three infield slots. In a sense, Rouse has been very useful in that his defense is nice to have and he allows us to not play Ben Francisco. To call him "valuable" seems like a stretch, though.

6) Are you sure you got the right name tags?

Rafael Betancourt was summoned from the pen to nail down the 8th inning for Paul Byrd, facing Death Eater Cust, Eric Chavez, and Mark Ellis. Although Cust singled, Chavez erased him on a double play and Ellis grounded out. In all, Betancourt needed seven pitches (five for strikes) to record three outs.

Joe Borowski was summoned from the pen to incinerate my stomach lining and get the save. After allowing a single to Dan Johnson (his fourth hit on the day) and inducing a pop out by Bobby Crosby, Jason Kendall, he of the .215/.254/.259 batting line that virtually defies belief, singled to left. Jason Michaels made an egregious misplay to allow Kendall to get to second, where he represented the go-ahead run. Even a productive out would score the game-tying run. Instead, Shannon Stewart popped out and Mark Kotsay flew to center to end the game.

Borowski needed 18 pitches to get through the inning. Ironically, the ratio of his ERA to Betancourt's (4.50) is roughly the same as the ratio of his salary to Betancourt's (4.76).

I don't have a lot more to offer to the Who Should Be Used When debate, except to point out that I would, on the surface, consider Cust-Chavez-Ellis to be the more dangerous offensive force than Johnson-Crosby-Kendall (Crosby is hitting .235; in fairness, Chavez is hitting .243, but I find Crosby's average to be more in line with career norms), so the better pitcher faced the better hitters, and huzzah. However, let me say this:

- a) Betancourt has been super in his role
- b) Borowski has been very successful in his role

Now, saves describe what DID happen, while other stats predict what IS LIKELY TO happen. I would feel more comfortable about the late innings with a pitcher with better statistics than Lord Joe. In the absence of this, though, consider that the current configuration netted a win in a one-run game. How much better is a different one going to do? Would we *hyperwin* the game? Get a gold star?

I understand the inclination to fret about using Borowski in a playoff game, but you know, how about we worry about that when we're ... er ... in a playoff game? Maybe then you can talk about using Perez to face the lefties in the 8th, or giving Betancourt a second inning. Hey, if we acquire a better pitcher, that will make the team better by virtue of General Betternessitude, but ... this is working, I'm loathe to mess with it in late June.

I will say this: Borowski has much much much much much much much much much more composure when he's on the mound than I do. I quit smoking, you bastard! Don't make me start again!

7) I'd like to report a robbery

Grady Sizemore had one double in four trips, but that doesn't tell you much about his day at the plate. In the 7th, after the single by Shoppach and the faux single by Barfield, Flores was called in to retire Sizemore. Sizemore hit a tremendous blast to right, but Nick Swisher made a tremendous play at the wall, diving and rolling to get Sizemore. (Actually, had Barfield stayed near the bag at second, he might have scored after tagging up, since Swisher bollixed the subsequent throw: since the ball was at the wall and Barfield is fast, there's no reason he couldn't have waited to see whether Swisher would get it, since he would easily have scored if the ball hadn't been caught.)

This marks the second day in a row Sizemore hit the ball very well and got no hit out of it, having had a liner snared yesterday. Grady's not in the same kind of slump Hafner was, but balls hit like that eventually fall in, so I wouldn't be surprised to see Sizemore have a very productive series against the Rays this weekend.

8) Trot Nixon Toast Watch

With a walk and no hits in three plate appearances, Nixon's Toast Level is now reading "Firm," with a Color Measure of "Golden." I hope to have insufficient data to make a real, longitudinal plot, but ... I bet I'll get enough.