

The B-List: 7/4

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Wednesday, July 04 2007 7:00 PM -

Man, I liked Kenny Rogers alot better when he was on the DL. Or when he's beating up camera men or lathering his body with pine tar. His mastery of the Indians continued last night, thanks to some defensive gems, and the Tigers beat the Indians 6-4 to set up today's rubber match between C.C. and Verlander, which is a 1:05 start. Buff recaps last night's game in today's B-List ...



FINAL SCORE				
Indians (51-33)	0	0	1	0
Tigers (48-34)	1	1	0	3

W: Rogers (3-0) L: Westbrook (1-4) S: Todd Jones (21)

It was a pretty good game last night, although I could barely hear the announcers over all the quacking.

1) A microcosm of two

They say baseball is a game of inches, which, given the dimensions of a baseball, is not very insightful, but they say it nonetheless. Instead of leading off with Jake Westbrook's start, which was mundane, I thought I'd look at a real-life illustration of this principle in action. Remember, the game ended Detroit 6, Cleveland 4.

In the top of the 4th inning, Victor Martinez grounded out and Travis Hafner walked. Hafner actually drew the walk after being down 1-2, although it should be noted that none of the next three pitches was particularly close to being called a strike, since Deryl Cousins was no longer behind the plate.

On the next pitch, Jason Michaels hit a solid line drive toward the left-field corner. When he hit the ball, it was not clear exactly where it would go, only that he had hit the ball well, but not well enough (nor with enough loft) to get out of cavernous Comerica Park. It was hit up, though, so there was a chance it would not drop in front of the left fielder, Marcus Thames. As it turned out, Thames made a nice diving catch on the play, forcing Hafner to hustle back to first: he had to re-touch second base on his way back, to give you an idea of how far he'd run.

On the very next pitch, Ryan Garko took an outside pitch the other way deep into right center. However, instead of bouncing off the high wall, the ball bounced harmlessly over the wall for a ground rule double, meaning that Hafner had to stop at third base. When Franklin Gutierrez grounded out to third, it ended the inning with a grand total of zero runs.

In the bottom of the frame, Jake Westbrook had already given up two runs when Placido Polanco came to the plate with Curtis Granderson on second base. There were two outs at the time, so the speedy Granderson would be running on any contact, almost guaranteed to score (because of his speed) on anything hit out of the infield that wasn't an out. Polanco lofted the 3-1 pitch to right field, near the line, and it was iffy as to whether the ball would drop or even be fair. Gutierrez made a nice sliding effort at the ball, but misplaced his slide slightly, and the ball hit the heel of his glove instead of the webbing, causing it to roll free as he rolled over. The umpire correctly ruled the "catch" to be invalid and Granderson scored the fifth run of the game for the Tigers.

Consider a world in which Marcus Thames does not catch his ball but Gutierrez does catch his. Michaels would surely have had at least a double if not more, and Hafner was well on his way to third. This means that both Hafner and Michaels would have scored in the inning, as the ground rule nature of Garko's double wouldn't have cost Michaels any bases. And since there were two outs when Polanco lifted his ball to right, Gutierrez' catch would have ended the inning without Granderson scoring. Final score: Cleveland 6, Detroit 5.

Note that I'm not saying Gutierrez is a bad fielder for not catching that ball: it would have been a nice catch after a long run. I think the fact that it hit his glove showed that the catch was certainly possible, but it wasn't a ham-handed error. And Thames' catch, although impressive, wasn't the greatest catch in the world or anything: it was just a nice play. But it just goes to show: sometimes, the distance between winning and losing really *is* measured in inches.

2) Reverting to form

Jake Westbrook has always been pretty much the same guy: he has been reliable, durable, and above-average. To date, he has combined a low K rate with a high GB:FB ratio to be successful. Of course, the more balls you allow in play, the more chances of the proverbial Game Of Inches biting you on the behind, but you also play the hand you're dealt, and Westbrook simply doesn't have a reliable swing-and-miss pitch. (He can get some people to fish for sinkers out of the zone, especially with a compliant umpire, but that doesn't fit my conception of an "out pitch.")

I thought that maybe the 7 Ks and the improved changeup from the Tampa Bay game might have signalled something, but it appears that the most likely message to draw from that is that Tampa Bay is not good. Detroit, on the other hand, is very good, and they didn't miss the ball. Westbrook only gave up 2 doubles and no other extra-base hits, but he gave up 8 singles in 6 innings: combined with 2 walks and only 3 Ks, this led to five Detroit runs.

Some of the hits were of the classical Westbrook variety: the back-to-back singles up the middle to start the 3-run 4th were sharp ground balls that would have been outs if hit on a different radian. So some of this is kind of unavoidable, and you chalk it up to "that's baseball." However, Granderson's double in the 4th

came after 2 balls and a foul AFTER Westbrook got ahead 0-2; Inge and Guillen both had RBI hits after falling behind in the count. I would like to see him finish off more hitters like he did against the Rays, but then, I suppose he would, too.

Is it just me, or did it look like Westbrook was short-arming the ball a little last night? I'm no mechanics expert, but his delivery reminded me of Scott Elarton's, and part of the reason Elarton is such an extreme flyball pitcher is that it's hard to get on top of a sinker with a "pushy" delivery like that.

3) Ducks on the pond!

The Indians got 10 hits, drew 6 walks, and benefitted from an error on Brandon Inge. You have to work hard to score only 4 runs with that many baserunners.

The Cleveland Indians worked *hard* last night.

The Indians left 11 men on base last night, an incomprehensible EIGHT of them in SCORING POSITION. They loaded the bases with one out in the 3rd and scored one run. They grounded out with runners at 2

nd

and 3

rd

(actually bases loaded in the 6

th

) to end EACH of the fourth through sixth innings. And they had two baserunners who weren't even included in the LOB stats because they were thrown out on the basepaths (Grady Sizemore picked off, Ben Francisco caught stealing). Detroit did a nice job and they won the game ... but it was probably easier with our help, although I suppose it can be hard to concentrate with all those guns propelling bullets into our own feet going off.

4) Pronk smash!

I may still be grasping at straws here, waiting to declare Travis Hafner officially an Offensive Asset again, but he's got a good track record, and hey, the man does have 54 RBI. He's just also hitting .257 and was the culprit of the inning-ending groundout in the 5th, when a mere single would have meant two runs. (Okay, maybe one: Victor Martinez was on second.)

However, down 5-2 with time running out, Hafner hit a pitch over the opposite field wall with man on first, off a left-handed reliever. Although the Cleveland offense was unable to muster much more after that, it was almost like clutch hitting.

Okay, I'm grasping at straws.

5) Everybody hits!

Lost in the fact that we left 11 men on base is that

we had 11 men to leave on base. Although the timing of the hits was pretty poor, the overall number of them was pretty good. Every Cleveland player had at least one hit, including late-inning replacement Ben Francisco, except Jhonny Peralta, who walked twice and scored a run. (He was also thrown out on a nice barehanded play by Inge in the 8th with two runners on.) Both Ryan Garko and Victor Martinez doubled off Kenny Rogers, who came into the game with a 0.75 ERA: although he left with a 1.04 and gave up only 1 earned run in 5 1/3 innings, he looked very mortal, giving up 7 hits and 3 walks.

Unfortunately, Josh Barfield was the only Indian to collect a second hit, although both left fielders had one apiece.

6) Eddie Moo sighting!

Here's a rule of thumb: when you give up back-to-back **triples** on consecutive pitches, you are not effective.

7) In direct contrast

On the other hand, if you come in, induce a foulout on your first pitch, then strike out the next two batters swinging (two swings-and-misses each), throwing 7 strikes in 9 pitches, you may indeed be considered effective. Fernando Cabrera may be working his way back into being used in Actual Game Situations here: I'm not lobbying for him to be the new closer or replacing a Raffy of either flavor, but I could see him being Tom Mastny now that Tom Mastny no longer is.

8) A tip of the cap

In the 4th inning, after a leadoff single by Ivan Rodriguez, the incredibly slow Sean Casey came to the plate. The combination of Jake Westbrook's slider and Sean Casey's slowness made my mouth water, as I was thinking keenly about a double play. Unfortunately, so was Jim Leyland, who sent Rodriguez, and Casey hit the ball up the middle on a hit-and-run. A nice piece of playing there, especially since Casey doesn't strike out a lot.

After a foulout, with runners at the corners, Brandon Inge laid down a nice, hard bunt past the pitcher to score Rodriguez on a safety squeeze play. (It looked like a "safety" rather than a

"suicide" to me, but it was a terrific bunt, at least from the standpoint of scoring the run.)

Anyway, they were kind of little plays, and Detroit's offense is certainly good enough to score runs in many ways, but it showed a nice bit of urgency from Leyland to tell him team that every run was going to count and this was an important series to the Tigers.

(Of course, then he brought in Jason Grilli, so this was kind of a mixed message, but hey.)