

The B-List: 7/20-7/22

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The Indians took a series on the road by winning three of four against the Rangers. Buff has the recap of the three weekend games in which he notes that the only players to truly hurt the team were those that he likes the most. Or, had up to this point. Amongst the comical defense of the Six Out Save, the poor emulation skills of Cliff Lee, and some timely hitting by the Indians (and not the Rangers), the B-List also asks the unknowable question, "What is worse than listening to the Rangers' announcing team?"



FINAL SCORE				
Indians (57-39)	0	0	0	0
Rangers (41-55)	0	0	0	0

W: Carmona (12-4) L: McCarthy (4-7) S: Borowski (28)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (57-40)	0	0	0	3
Rangers (42-55)	5	0	0	0

W: Mahay (2-0) L: C. Lee (5-7)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (58-40)	0	0	0	2
Rangers (42-56)	0	0	0	0

W: Byrd (8-4) L: Tejeda (5-9)

After announcing my Favorite Player is Cliff Lee and announcing that Tom Mastny

was competing for his spot, I would like to announce that Justin Verlander looks a lot like a good Steve's Favorite Player candidate.

1) Lessons learned

Lacking confidence in his curveball and struggling with command this season, Cliff Lee apparently looked to his rotation mates for inspiration. He could have chosen to learn Jake Westbrook's sinker in an effort to raise his GB:FB ratio over 1.00. He could have chosen to emulate Paul Byrd's propensity for pounding the strike zone, even in the complete and total absense of Actual Stuff. He could have developed Fausto Carmona's composure or velocity. He could have eaten Mike Rouse in an effort to sport a build more like C.C. Sabathia's.

Instead, he chose to incorporate Sabathia's Inning of Crap TM.

The Rangers, in previous years known for good hitting but bad pitching, have recently addressed this imbalance by becoming weak on offense. Their DH's hit about .235. Injuries have forced Ramon Vazquez to play regularly and rookie Travis Metcalf to start at third. In the lineup used Saturday, the final four hitters sported averages of .222, .233, .199, and .194. Vazquez led off. Led off! This is simply not an offense optimized to score runs.

Unless, of course, Cliff Lee is on the mound before his third cup of coffee or whatever it is that gets Lee to start pitching instead of joining the Fredo Cabrera School of Groovy Grooving. Single, single, double, K, double, single, double. I can't even blame a lack of control: Lee started five of these seven players with a strike, but only the 7th (Laird) waited past the third pitch to whack the ball pinata-style. For good

measure, Laird took third on a wild pitch, but Jerry Hairston Jr. and Metcalf were inept enough to make outs to catcher Victor Martinez (foul out, K).

I mean, there's not much analysis to be done there: Lee threw beachballs, Rangers hit said beachballs, five runs scored. That's just awful.

And then the ghost of Tony Pena (which is impressive on many levels, in that Pena is no longer affiliated with the Cleveland system and is also Not Dead) slapped Lee upside the head, after which Lee gave up one infield single and beamed Sammy Sosa in five more innings of work. That's it. Three of five innings were perfect, Lee struck out four (more), and generally looked like a major-league starter.

Now, much has been made about the confrontations between Lee and Victor Martinez, especially after he struck Sosa in the head (to date, Sosa has no lasting effects and will play tonight, which is good news for how solidly he was struck). I am struggling to imagine this conversation about "tactics:"

Martinez: Hey! Pendejo! Don't hit him in the head!

Lee: *Bitch, bitch, bitch!* First it's "throw strikes" and then it's "stop throwing meatballs" and now it's "don't hit anyone upside the head." Make up your mind already!

Martinez: *What do you mean, make up my mind?* Those things aren't mutually exclusive!

Lee: *You're just persecuting me because I'm white.*

Martinez: *No, I'm persecuting you because you **suck**. Stop sucking!*

Lee: *Man, you're just never satisfied, are you?*

Martinez: *Not with sucking, no.*

I mean, I kind of have to side with Martinez here.

By the way, Lee turned into a banana in the 7th, surprising a yam farmer in New Guinea, and Tom Mastny finished Lee off with a 3-run triple to Marl Byrd. Sweet!

2) Wind patterns at Rangers Ballpark

It's one thing when Robinson Tejeda can't find the strike zone. Tejeda is notorious for not pitching in the strike zone. In fact, right there in his scouting report:

Wouldn't suck so much if he threw pitches in the strike zone

So when Robinson Tejeda walks five guys in five innings, that's kind of the Cost of Doing Business with Robinson Tejeda. Even the aforementioned yam farmer was unimpressed by this. But consider Paul Byrd's fifth inning Sunday, working on a 1-hitter and having walked 8 men all season, only because he'd walked two in his last start:

Adam Melhuse: Ball, Ball, Ball, Ball

Now, Adam Melhuse is a clod. He was only in the game because Byrd had whacked Gerald Laird on the hand with an 0-2 pitch. Come to think of it, that's not much like Byrdian control. Anyway, you throw strikes to Adam Melhuse, largely because he is Not Gerald Laird. Think about this for a moment. He is less than Gerald Laird. All right, let's move on.

Brad Wilkerson: Ball, Ball, Ball, Ball

Admittedly, Wilkerson is on a bit of a tear, having raised his average all the way up to224. Hey! You're Paul Byrd! Throw him a strike!

Ramon Vazquez: Ball, Ball, Ball

Now this is just preposterous. It's Ramon F*#&ing Vazquez! Great googly moogly! Throw him a strike!

Vazquez (cont.): Strike (looking), Strike (looking), Foul, Foul, Ball

So, with no outs and a previously-comfortable 5-0 lead, Paul Byrd ... Paul Byrd! ... has WALKED THE BASES LOADED. Against a very weak offensive team. That includes Ramon Vazquez!

Byrd got out of the inning on a strikeout and Kenny Lofton's thirty-eight-thousandth GIDP. (I think they stopped the game.)

So in the next inning, when Byrd turned into a newt and did not get better, Raffy Perez was summoned. Now, Perez throws strikes: in an outing last week, he pumped 21 of 25 pitches through the strike zone. Last night, however, he started Melhuse and Wilkerson each with two balls, the second of which to Wilkerson was a wild pitch. Pitching in the following inning, Perez started 3-0 to each of Travis Fungus and Kenny Lofton. So, given our two most-reliable strike-throwers, both could not hit the Rock of Gibraltar with a bazooka at thirty feet.

Anyway, other than that, Byrd pitched very well for five innings. I'll take it.

3) Fausto™!

Boy, he's good.

(For the record: 8 IP, 3 H, 3 BB, 7 K, 0 R.)

4) The Master of the Six Out Save

What looked like a situation for one of those Terribly Cheap Saves where a guy gets three outs with a three-run lead to notch a bogus counting stat turned into an Adventurous Adventure Friday as Joe Borowski relieved Carmona to polish off the game. And normally, you might talk about how if Borowski didn't give up a pair of hits every time out, we'd tear fewer hairs out in his general direction. But that really doesn't do justice to Joe's Excellent Adventure: after recording a quick out, Borowski induced a routine ground ball to first baseman Ryan Garko, who slapped it with his frying pan before kicking it with his hockey skates. (In his defense, he was wearing oven mitts at the time.) The

subsequent pair of singled scored a run, but hey, it's still only 3-1, he had a cushion.

Marlon Byrd, hitting roughly .855 against Cleveland, slapped a ground ball to Casey Blake, who stepped on third for the second out, then failed in his attempt to fling the ball into the upper deck. Although technically not an error (because an out was recorded, official scorers don't "expect" double plays, and who knows, Byrd may have been trying to take a very circuitous route to first through Section 34), a good throw would have ended the game.

Borowski then walked Frank Catalanotto in disbelief at his own defense. Regaining his composure, he induced a routine ground ball to Mike Rouse at shortstop.

Let us pause here for a moment. Mike Rouse is

feldspar. He did have a hit Friday (part of an "Armageddon Special" in which Nixon and Rouse had subsequent hits, but fortunately Casey Blake made an out with runners in scoring position and the world was saved) and drove in a run Sunday by shrewdly not using telescoping bat to reach one of Tejeda's four balls with the bases loaded, but Rouse is an offensive liability. Thankfully, he can play good defense at three positions (2B, SS, 3B), and is thus a useful member of the team.

Had he done that, of course. He did not, and a second run scored on his error.

Borowski, who by this time had had quite enough, struck out Brad Wilkerson and went home.

5) We get the point!

Rafael Betancourt works slowly. Yes, indeedy doo. He is slow. He takes a long time to get set. He takes a long time to work from the top of his stretch to the bottom. The so-called Umpire Egg Timer was invented for Raffy Betancourt.

But the Rangers' announcers seemed to be completely flummoxed by this. They talked about it every time. They talked about it when he was warming up. They talked about it after he left. They compared the experience of watching him pitch to many other activities. Oddly enough, they did not compare the Excruciability Factor with that of listening to the Rangers' announcers, who also, during Raffy's inning, talked about Betty Crocker, Jim Sundberg's children, and a family of ducks which lived on the pond of one of the announcers. (I don't remember which one: it was either Dickhead or Other Dickhead.)

Damn, those guys are annoying. Betancourt, on the

other hand, was just fine, giving up no runs because he is Raffy Betancourt.

6) Dept. of Orel Hershiser Impressions

Jensen Lewis has a whimsical little leg-kick. I can't argue with the results, but I'm also afraid to mention them, given my track record ruining young pitchers.

That Justin Verlander sure can pitch, can't he? I expect great things from him, including a perfect game, a game of at least 15 strikeouts, and a Pulitzer Prize. Yes, that's what I meant, Justin Verlander. Do you hear me, Karma Police? V-E-R-L-A-N-D-E-R.

7) Timely Timeliness

Victor Martinez had only one hit Sunday, but it came with runners on second and third and produced two runs.

Jason Michaels went 1-for-5 in an unusual start against a right-hander Sunday, but it came with runners on second and third and produced two runs.

The Indians scored three runs on Friday, including one on a groundout immediately after a wild pitch moved Josh Barfield from second to third, and a two-run homer by Travis Hafner in the next inning.

8) Let's take two

Victor Martinez had three hits Friday, each of which was a double. Of the six hits allowed by starter

Brandon McCarthy, four were doubles (one was by Josh Barfield).

Casey Blake had three hits Sunday, two of which were doubles.

9) Other notables

Barfield had a nice weekend overall, going 4-for-10 with a walk, 3 RBI, 4 runs scored, and stole his 11th base. He also made at least two outstanding plays in the field, showing range to both his left and right.

Trot Nixon had a hit in each of the three contests.

Ryan Garko extended his hitting streak with a single Friday and two more hits Saturday.

Every Cleveland Indian who batted reached base Sunday night.

Grady Sizemore hit his 17th home run of the season off left-handed Ron Mahay Saturday. However, this was his only hit in the three games, as he went 1-for-12 (albeit with 3 walks).

Jhonny Peralta made five plate appearances Sunday without putting the ball in play, striking out thrice and walking twice. He also struck out twice Friday. Walking, good. Striking out, not so good.

10) A serious note

Condolences to the family of Mike Coolbaugh.