

The B-List: 7/24

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

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That's what you call a good old fashioned pitcher's duel. In C.C., Betancourt, Dice K, Okajima, and Papelbon ... we saw five of the best pitchers in the AL this year in last night's game. And sadly, the Indians came up on the wrong end of it. On a brighter note, in today's B-List, Buff's explanation of how the BoSox got that one run is one of the funnier things I've read in weeks.



FINAL SCORE

Red Sox (61-39)	0	0	0	1
Indians (58-42)	0	0	0	0

W: Matsuzaka (12-7) L: Sabathia (13-5) S: Papelbon (23)

Hey, the Red Sox have a Japanese pitcher! Did you know that?

1) Because "a game of inches" sounds a lot better than "a game of clods";

I'd certainly been a little concerned with C.C. Sabathia's last few starts: both Detroit and Kansas City pounded him for double-digit hits, the Tigers in only 4 innings. He'd given up at least one homer in each of his last three starts, walked two Royals (the only time in his past ten starts he'd walked more than one), and struck out only 2 against Texas in 6 innings of work. His ERA had "ballooned" from 3.09 on June 10 to 3.81 before the game: still good,

but that's a whole month of pretty mediocre pitching.

Last night's start was not mediocre.

It wasn't a win, either, but it was a fine start: 7 innings, 5 hits (3 in one inning) and no walks against 7 strikeouts, and the game's single run to absorb his fifth loss. None of the five hits were for extra bases, and it could be argued that none of the five hits were even well-struck.

You've probably seen the highlights by now: the lone run was scored in the 4th when Kevin Youkilis hit a blooper in front of Trot Nixon's wheelchair in right, then Manny had the closest thing to a solid single to put runners at first and second. After blowing away Covelli Crisp, Sabathia had Mike Lowell 1-2 with two outs before Lowell lifted a routine fly ball to left. Ben Francisco, exhibiting the keen depth perception of a wall-eyed pike, ran back to the track before rushing in to not catch the ball, allowing Youkilis to score.

Four of Sabathia's seven innings were 1-2-3, including the 7th in which he struck out his final two batters swinging. One inning was not perfect because he gave up an infield single ... to Manny Ramirez. Manny Ramirez! (Actually, this is more of an "official scorer" issue than "Manny Ramirez" issue: it looked like Blake could have made the play.) We just couldn't score.

2) Get him early

The last time Daisuke Matsuzaka faced the Indians, the patient

Tribesmen wore Dice-K out and eventually pounded him. This time, Grady Sizemore led off the game with a single and promptly stole second. He was thrown out at third trying to advance on a groundout by Blake, but Martinez fought through an 8-pitch walk and Garko was hit by a pitch one out later to load the bases. Jhonny Peralta then whiffed to end the threat.

Sizemore had another single/stolen base combo in the third, but it came to naught. After Garko doubled in the next inning (missing a homer by a small amount), Nixon drew a one-out walk, but Francisco and Josh Barfield whiffed.

Basically, this was like wearing out Matsuzaka in reverse: as the game wore on, the Cleveland offense got more and more inept. When you have opportunities against a guy like Matsuzaka, you have take advantage of guys in scoring position, because you don't get all that many (WHIP 1.26, fewer than 3 runs allowed in 7 of his last 10 starts).

3) Warning track power

Looking at the chart of where the outs were, there were at least five balls the Indians hit that simply died within spitting distance of the wall. The wind wasn't blowing in extraordinarily, but had

a couple of those balls gone a little farther, we'd be talking about how great it was to beat Matsuzaka behind such a great start from Sabathia.

4) Replace the best with the best

Sabathia threw 106 pitches through 7 innings, there was no reason to send him out for another inning, especially against a team like Boston known for working counts. So Eric Wedge simply dipped into his bag of great pitchers and pulled out his Raffy Betancourt. Betancourt pitched 2 innings of 1-hit ball, striking out 1 and walking zero. It's a shame that he went two innings and will need the night off tonight, but it's a one-run game: you have to hold them scoreless, and no one is better at this (on our staff) than Betancourt.

Of course, when Terry Francona ran out of Fantastic Japanese Pitcher in the spicy Matsuzaka flavor, he reached into his bag and pulled out another in Hideki Okajima, he of the 0.91 ERA. Okajima threw a perfect 8th, using 14 pitches to retire the heart of the Cleveland order (Martinez, Hafner, Garko).

And, of course, for a change of pace, Francona simply

went to his closer Jon Papelbon (French for "Them's good papels!"), who needed 12 pitches to get Peralta to pop out and to strike out Nixon and Francisco swinging. Papelbon's ERA of 1.72 was the lamest of all relief pitchers, almost 50% higher than Betancourt's (1.15) and almost double Okajima's.

That's ... uh ... that's some good pitching right there: Sabathia, Matsuzaka, Betancourt, Okajima, Papelbon. Wow.

5) Terror on the Basepaths!

Grady Sizemore stole two bases, although he was thrown out at third trying to advance to ... uh ... third ... on a ground ball to ... mm ... third. Hm.

Josh Barfield also stole his 12th base.

6) Streaking

Ryan Garko extended his hit streak by being hit.

(Okay, no, that's not true: he extended the streak by doubling. He got hit too, though.)

Thankfully, this heading is only about his hitting streak and not about him taking part in the fad from the '70s. (Garko is really slow.)

7) Also streaking

Travis Hafner has four consecutive 0-for-4 games.

8) Troublesome trends

Jhonny Peralta struck out in an 0-for-4 night. This isn't a big deal: Peralta strikes out some, but he's only got 87 in 95 games, not a huge number.

However, Peralta's pitches per plate appearance is under 4 for the first time since his rookie season (3.94): his GB:FB ratio has risen from 1.29 to 1.47 to 1.61 over the past three seasons. Since being up at .526 SLG on June 1, his slugging percentage has gone down to .446, largely on the strength of ... well ... not slugging (.421 in June, .352 thus far in July). Basically, Peralta is jumping on balls earlier in the count, and hitting them down (it's hard to hit a ground ball for extra bases). That needs to change back to May, or Peralta is no longer an offensive asset.