

The B-List: 8/2

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That really would have stunk to get swept by the Rangers, fresh off them gutting their team. Luckily, Jake Westbrook and the Tribe got back on track yesterday, cruising to a 5-0 win. As Buff says in today's column, Jake's season has not been one to write home about, unless you hate your family or are Stephen King. Off to Minnesota for a BIG series with the Twins ...



FINAL SCORE					
Rangers (48-60)	0	0	0	0	0
Indians (61-47)	0	0	1	0	0

W: Westbrook (2-6) L: Gabbard(4-1)

Boy, that opposing starter looked familiar.

1) Swapping out

To this point, the rotation has largely consisted of Sabathia and Carmona being great, then two of Westbrook, Lee, and Sowers looking one of the thirty-one flavors of horrific they have to offer, and then whatever we happen to get from Paul Byrd. Fortunately for us, to this point, Byrd has been good more often than bad. Unfortunately for us, thirty-one flavors is a whole lot of horrific.

After a stretch of four pretty good starts, Paul Byrd has thrown up (so to speak) two straight starts of double-digit hits each. That he managed to win one (while lowering his ERA!) and not lose the other speaks to the genius that is Vaseli ... er, veteran savvy. But this is looking like one of those cycles in which the two good starts of Sabathia and Carmona aren't going to be able to pencil in a third by Byrd.

If the Tribe is going to put together any sort of sustained push to pass Detroit and stay ahead of Seattle and New York, it is going to need a third starter.

Which brings us to Jake Westbrook. Jake's season has not been one to write home about, unless you hate your family or are Stephen King. Westbrook's ERA was not repugnant at 5.85 entering the game, but 5.85 ain't good. His WHIP over one-and-a-half is no great shakes, where "no great shakes" is a quaint way of saying "shitty." And his 1-6 record, while not entirely deserved or representative of his skill, is still a 1-6 record.

Matched up against Johan Santana last time out, Westbrook had every reason to crumble under the weight of Santana's lengthy no-hit bid and his overarching Johan Santananness. However, Westbrook didn't crumble, and in fact pitched very well, going seven innings of four-hit (albeit three-walk) ball, giving up two runs and getting a no decision (the Indians managed to bollix the game, but the point is that Westbrook basically fought Santana to a standstill). Stringing together two consecutive good outings is still one short of the Business Calculus Proof of Induction, but would still go a long way toward suggesting that Westbrook is healthier and more ready to contribute to a winning campaign.

It wasn't quite as good, but hardly anyone posts fewer offensive threats than the Twins: Westbrook went 6 innings of 5-hit ball, walking only 1 and striking out 5. Most importantly, the Rangers did not score a run off Westbrook. In fact, Westbrook's worst inning was the first, in which a double by Michael Young put runners at second and third with one out. Westbrook then got two quick swinging strikes against rookie Jason Botts, tried three times to get him to fish at a ball out of the zone, then finally got him to foul out. He then got Marlon Byrd to strike out swinging.

Now, Botts is a recent callup and may possibly never have seen a sinker quite like Westbrook's. And Marlon Byrd, .326 average or no, steadfastly remains Marlon Byrd, proclamations by the Texas front office notwithstanding. Still, it's getting out of a jam, and it's impractical to bring Raffy Perez into the game in the top of the

first.

In fact, after giving up another single in the second, Westbrook threw three perfect innings in the third through fifth before giving up another couple hits in the sixth, getting out of a jam, and ceding the floor to the aforementioned Perez. The five strikeouts are unusual for Westbrook, although so is the 6:7 GB:FB ratio, which I consider statistical noise at this point. Ultimately, a couple more starts like this, and Westbrook would have to be considered the favorite to be considered the Magical Third Starter in any sort of late-season push. Although this falls somewhat short of making me feel confidently warm and fuzzy, it laps the cold sweat induced by considering Paul Byrd my third most-reliable starter, or the malarial chill induced by Cliff Lee, Jeremy Sowers, or Jason Stanford. (Aaron Laffey remains an unknown pathogen to this point.)

2) Wait, does that mean he's going to shoot out of the room?

To someone who used the term Inertia Man to refer to Eric Wedge last season, today's lineup showed a remarkable willingness to consider something different. Travis Hafner was given the day off, possibly to sit out against the left-handed Kason Gabbard, possibly to rest his Inflammation of the Suck, but was rested nonetheless. In his place at DH, not customary sluggers Victor Martinez or Ryan Garko, but Grady Sizemore. And in Sizemore's stead, Kenny Lofton in Center, flanked by Jason Michaels and Franklin Gutierrez.

Now, really, this isn't entirely radical: it's not like Lofton has never played center before (he's done it many, many more times than Sizemore, after all), and the other outfield slots are the regulation lefty-facing hitters. However, a willingness to give Sizemore a day off from fielding while simultaneously throwing Lofton a bone and hitting Hafner with another shows a certain aplomb I wouldn't have expected from Wedge.

By the way, the new alignment paid dividends, as Sizemore went 2-for-3 with a

sac fly, Lofton went 2-for-4 with an RBI “single,” and Hafner did not break his jaw grinding his teeth. Jason Michaels did manage to ground into a double play, but that’s neither here nor there.

3) Son of Revenge of Small Ball

For a team struggling to score runs, sometimes it’s worth going to extra mile to jump-start the offense. In this case, Cleveland’s first run was a result of Franklin Gutierrez drawing a walk, being sacrificed to second by 9-hitter Josh Barfield, and scoring on Sizemore’s single up the middle.

Now, technically, Gutierrez made it to third after a wild pitch by Gabbard, but it was still a smallball run as far as I’m concerned, and anything that nets us a run in this recent stretch (fewer than 3 runs scored in 6 of 9 games before this one) has to be considered a boon.

Cleveland’s second and fourth runs scored on sacrifice flies; its third was on a ground ball to deep short that Lofton beat out for an infield single.

4) Vic smash!

Its fifth run was a solo shot by Victor Martinez.

(In his previous ten games, Martinez had two hits, both singles, in 30 ABs, which is Rousian.)

5) Everybody hits! (Except you)

Each Cleveland hitter had at least one hit, except Casey Blake, who did manage to offset his inning-ending double play somewhat with a sacrifice fly. Sizemore, Garko, and Lofton each had two hits.

6) Just like playing catch in the back yard with your Dad

Well, not with MY Dad. *My* Dad used a ***glove***. Instead, Kason Gabbard and Adam Melhuse tried the innovative method of using buttered toast, and yielded a pair of wild pitches (each of which led to a run), a hit batsman (who scored, because he was also advanced by one of the wild pitches), and a passed ball (which led to hoots of derisive laughter).

Franklin Gutierrez also stole second, but I'm going to credit F-Goot for that one rather than blame the slippery nature of churned dairy products.

7) Eddie Moo Sighting!

He threw an inning! And no one died! (It was actually quite good, with 7 strikes in 9 pitches, a perfect inning with 1 K.)

8) Ho Hum Dept.

Raffy Perez threw two scoreless innings. He did give up Jason Botts' first hit of the season, but then struck Marlon Byrd out swinging on three pitches, so only Botts' immediate family was interested.