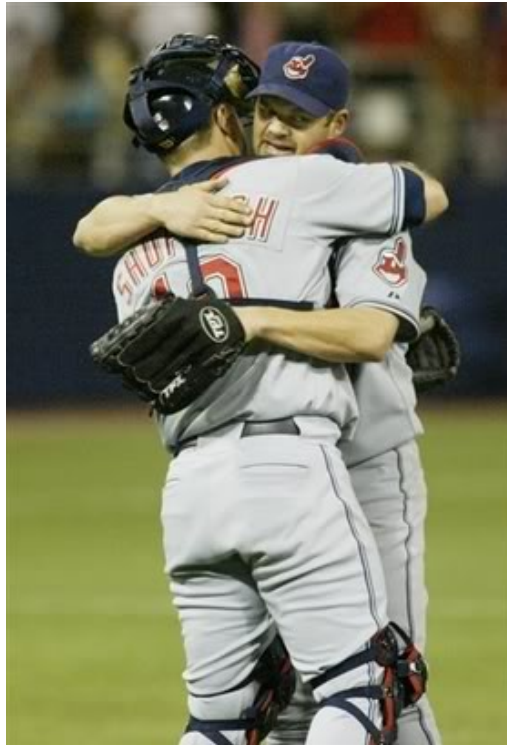


The B-List: 8/6

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
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The Indians salvaged a split with the Twins in a series in which the pitching staff gave up six runs TOTAL in the FOUR GAMES. Anchoring this effort was Paul Byrd, who came through with a shutout, and yes, it still counts even if it's against a team that used Jason Tyner as a DH. In today's B-List, Buff touches on Byrd being potentially unappreciated, while completely unappreciating Mineral Mike Rouse.



FINAL SCORE				
Indians (63-49)	0	0	0	0
Twins (57-54)	0	0	0	0

W: Byrd (10-4) L: Silva (9-12)

If you can't dazzle 'em with brilliance, baffle 'em with Byrdshit.

1) The Dominator!

"I walked over to Casey [Blake] and Victor [Martinez] and said, 'If you're not right with Jesus, get right with Him, because He may be coming back. I just got Morneau out twice.'" - Paul Byrd

Paul Byrd is aware of his limitations as a pitcher, and has been a wonderful source for self-deprecating quotes and manly fault-acceptance (even for things that weren't really his fault). And we can make any number of amusing comments about smoke and mirrors and guile and foreign substances and Eddie Harris from "Major League," knowing that Byrd has probably made the same comments about himself.

What we sometimes forget is that Paul Byrd can pitch.

Paul Byrd is not Fausto Carmona: you don't know for sure when he steps on the mound what you're going to get. In his last start against Texas, he gave up nearly two hits and an inning, and has given up (exactly) ten hits in four of his past ten starts. It's not unusual for Byrd to wave sayonara by the end of the sixth inning, and he had only pitched into as much as the 8th inning in one start this season (July 8, Toronto). Still, the man has one of the higher talent-to-abuse ratios on the team, and it's easy to forget that his 10-4 record isn't entirely a product of run support (as it was early last season): his ERA is a respectable 4.13 with a WHIP of 1.33. He is no longer the Walkless Guru he has been earlier in the season, but that was really only good in May (4-0, 3.60 ERA). It wasn't so hot to be not walking people in June, when he sported a brisk 6.91 ERA and went 1-2.

Since a trio of double-digit hit fiascoes in June, Byrd appears to have rediscovered something from the Crafty Bin: in his past nine starts, he may not have always met the threshold for a Quality Start, but has given up 4 runs 4 times, 3 runs twice, 2 runs once, 1 run once, and now 0 runs once. In two of the 4-run affairs, one of the 4 runs was unearned. Now, this is no great dominating asset, but those are games we have chances to win without any real clunkers. (Admittedly, 4 runs in 5 1/3 innings, as in Texas 8/1, is not particularly helpful.)

Last night's matchup with the Twins was a step up from Simply Crafty,

though: it matched Byrd's reasonably-good stuff with a good understanding of his opponent. The Twins had produced a grand total of 6 runs in the previous three games and have been hitting very poorly for a couple of weeks now. They are pressing. And Byrd got them to bite on stuff that was *juuuust* off. Consider the sixth:

Nick Punto: Strike (looking), groundout to pitcher☐

Jason Tyner: Ball, flyout to right☐

Alexi Casilla: Ball, flyout to center

Now, yes, the first thing you notice is that a potential playoff contender is batting Nick Punto, Jason Tyner, and Alexi Casilla consecutively. At least Tyner isn't the DH any more. But the second thing you notice is that Byrd started two of them off with pitches out of the strike zone. I'm not saying the Byrd has such masterful control that he never throws a ball unintentionally, but it's worth noting that all three guys saw a pitch, then badly hit the second. I'm making an attribution I have no direct evidence for, but based on what I saw, Byrd was moving the ball around at the edges, and spent a significant amount of time right on the border of where a ball could and could not be hit solidly. Another good example was the 7th:

Joe Mauer walked☐

Michael Cuddyer: Ball, pop out to short☐

Justin Morneau: pop out to short☐

Torii Hunter: Ball, pop out to second

Did they want to kill that ball or what?

Four of Byrd's first six innings were perfect: in all, he gave up 4 hits and a walk in a 99-pitch complete game shutout. (I suppose that's redundant, but I like the emphasis.) One of the hits was a double, but Byrd induced a pair of groundouts with a man on third to quash the quasi-threat. I'm still not ready to say, "I am confident with Paul Byrd on the mound, hand that man a playoff start!" However, I'm reasonably happy he's in the rotation.

2) Pronk smash!

This deep into the season, there is no subset of data that will suffice for me to claim that Travis Hafner is "definitely out of his slump." Forget "slump:" the man hasn't hit since April, and he's not going to. All we can hope for at this point is that he'll be able to perform at league-average level until he can heal up or rest or get memory replacement therapy or sports psychologize through whatever it is that's causing this season to be a Simple Loss.

However, Hafner did hit two balls very well last night: the home run off Silva in the 7th might have been hit as hard as a baseball

can be struck, and the smash that Casilla snared with the bases loaded in the 8th was well-hit as well.

On the other other hand, Hafner grounded into a double play with men on first and second (to third!) and left 5 men on base.

I guess in the final analysis, Travis Hafner can hit, but I'm not counting on it. I could in 2005 and 2006, but not in 2007.

3) Mr. Clutch

After Hafner's double play in the 4th, Casey Blake, batting in an odd 5-slot, came to the plate with a runner on second and two outs. Not only was the runner in scoring position, which normally petrifies Blake to the point of inaction, but it was Victor Martinez, whose running style is hard to distinguish from inaction. (He's slow. Also, the sun is hot.)

Much has been made of Blake's disparity between hitting with no one on base (.304/.380/.535) and with runners on (.223/.300/.358). Or with runners in scoring position (.168/.274/.292). Or men on with 2 outs (.152/.247/.316). Or men in scoring position with 2 outs (.123/.219/.316). Well, actually, it was .108 last night, and NOW it's .123, because Blake came through with a single to score Martinez.

This actually makes twice in the space of a week that Blake has had a hit with 2 outs and someone in scoring position. I will stop short of calling this a significant trend-changer. I do appreciate it, though.

Blake later drove in a second run with a crafty groundout, a testament to his gritty guttiness and his veteran leadership. (Actually his speed in not getting doubled up.)

4) Flashing the leather

The game ended when, after a single by Joe Mauer, Indian-killer Mike Cuddyer hit a ground ball that Victor Martinez, playing first last night, turned into a 3-6-3 double play. I liked this because:

- a) Martinez showed nice athleticism turning two there
- b) Paul Byrd did not die after being forced to cover first

5) More appreciated than expected

Jhonny Peralta went 3-for-4 last night, including a two-strike two-out RBI single off Pat Neshek and his Contortionist's Delivery. His first three times up he hit the ball to the opposite field, with a pair of singles

and a fly out. I like when Peralta goes the other way, it makes me believe he is less likely to swing so preposterously at sliders in the dirt as if he wants to pull them. But then, I am a sucker for seeing the good in all men.

6) Wazoo Alert

MLB's website is reporting that the Indians have designated Mineral Mike Rouse for assignment. After hitting .119/.200/.134 in 67 AB this season (well below his career numbers of .165/.238/.209, so maybe it was just an off year for Rouse), I am open to suggestions as to his new assignment. Lamp post? Umbrella stand? Glass blower?

Really, he was just horrible. I lobbied for him to be the Utility Infielder out of Spring Training, and I was wrong. Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong. Wrongity wrong. Very, very wrong. I am very sorry.

Well, about being wrong, I mean. About Mineral Mike getting the wazoo, no, not so sorry. G'day, mate!

7) Having the leather flashed back

If you haven't had a chance, go to a highlight site (ESPN's recap, MLB.com) and check out Alexi Casilla snaring Hafner's bases-loaded grounder and throwing Grady Sizemore out at the plate from his tuchas. Outstanding.

8) Old Power!

Kenny Lofton beat out a bunt single as part of

loading the bases in the 8th. As someone roughly Lofton's age, but lacking any knees, this impresses me.