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He's baaaaack. Yes, that's right Tribe fans, the Jake Westbrook we knew, loved, and applauded the Indians organization for extending ... appears to be rounding back into form. In today's B-List, Buff talks about the Good Jake, the Bad Jake, his bowling game, the most underappreciated and unflappable closer in team history, and the Indians continued poor plate discipline.



FINAL SCORE				
Indians (64-49)	0	0	0	0
White Sox (52-60)	1	0	0	0

W: Westbrook (3-6) L: Danks (6-9) S: Borowski (31)

If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs ... you'll be the Indians' closer my son!

-- Rudyard Borowski

1) Look, Dad, I remember something from college!

As an undergraduate, I always took at least one course per semester that had nothing to do with my majors. Few of these courses were anything that changed my life or I use today (there is a limited call for the anthropological tenets of Margaret Mead in the chemical management business), but then, much the same could be said for my majors (there is a limited call for complex analytic dynamics

on the Riemann Sphere in any business whatsoever).

One of the courses I took was an upper-level psychology class in Mental Imagery, which was admittedly an interesting class. I wrote one of my papers on the topic of kinesthetics, which is kind of like "muscle memory:" by repeating an action many times, high-level conscious thought doesn't bother getting engaged, so, for example, I could play a song on the piano without looking at the keys, or drive in traffic without looking at the road. No, wait, that's not a good example. Let's stick with the piano. I am an excellent driver. Definitely time for Wapner.

In any event, the topic of kinesthetics stuck with me, especially with respect to athletics. I'm a pretty good bowler, for example, averaging about 190, and have thrown a 750 set once. I know *how* to throw a perfect game, but I never *have*, and the reason is because knowing and doing aren't identical concepts. If I could throw the same ball with the same spin with the same loft to the same part of the alley with the same speed with the same approach, I could get the same result every time, except, of course, I can't. It's hard. My steps are off or my release is off or I throw it slightly harder or I hit a patch of oil or whatever. The difference between a "good bowler" and a professional is that repeatability, the ability to consistently do the same thing over and over and over and over and over.

Jake Westbrook came off the DL on June 24, when he pitched 7 innings against the Washington Nationals, giving up 3 runs on 7 hits and inducing 13 ground ball outs. In a sense, this is quintessential Jake Westbrook: he only struck out two, but he kept the ball in the park, went deep into the game, got a lot of ground balls with his sinker, and he's pretty much back on the horse. His next start (against Tampa) was even better, giving up 1 run in 7 innings.

His next four starts, though, were a bit of a mixed bag: he gave up 10 hits twice, walked 5 batters once and 4 batters once, and lost three of the four games. Now, certainly poor run support didn't help much (the Indians scored 4, 2, and 1 runs in those games), but the starts weren't really very good, either. In a sense,

"getting back on the horse" may have been a premature description of Westbrook's return. Instead, this looked more like a pitcher struggling to find that precision and repeatability that separates a frontline starter from a journeyman from a career minor leaguer from Jason Davis.

Since then, Westbrook has started three games, giving up 4 hits in 7 innings, 5 hits in 6 innings, and now (last night) 2 hits in 8 innings. His walks have been cut from 3 to 1 to 0, and has given up a total of 3 runs in those 18 innings. Last night's performance may not have been *thoroughly* dominant, but the two hits were singles, and the only other batter to reach base was hit by a pitch. After giving up a run in the first on a single, SB, base-advancing groundout, and sacrifice fly, Westbrook retired the next 11 men in order, gave up a single, then retired the next 11 men in order. Six of Westbrook's eight innings involved zero baserunners. His 13:6 GB:FB ratio was mundane by Westbrook's standards, but he struck out 5. He has lowered his season ERA (grossly inflated by his early-season struggles, potentially influenced by continuing to pitch before reporting his injury) from 7.90 before his DL stint to 5.00: it was 6.20 as recently as his fourth "struggling" start against Boston July 23.

Over the course of a long season, it's pretty rare for a starter to have 30 excellent starts. (It's pretty rare for one to have 30 lousy ones, too, unless Jose Lima returns.) This may simply be part of the normal fluctuation a starter has over the course of a season. Still, watching Westbrook saw through the Chicago lineup just LOOKED like a pitcher with much better command of his stuff, a pitcher who was not *thinking* about where to throw the ball, but *trusting* that his body/arm/hand/fingers would "know" how to pitch effectively.

I could be overanalyzing this. Thankfully, Jake, it appears, is not.

2) To the master of the six out save, a five out save is but a trifle

A few weeks ago, Joe Borowski turned a 3-0 easy save into a 3-2 nailbiter with

the help of his teammates' amusing collection of iron gloves and RPBs (rocket-propelled baseballs). Borowski contributed a bit to this effort, but the fact is, the Indians gave their opponent three extra outs, and frankly, that's rude to Joe.

So last night, Victor Martinez and Ryan Garko combined to give only TWO extra outs away.

Borowski began the inning by throwing four pitches that Jerry Owens did not swing at: one ball and three strikes. However, Martinez did not actually *catch* the fourth pitch, so Owens was able to scramble to first. Think about this for a moment: it is one thing to have a passed ball, but this was a STRIKE. Strike three, in fact! Catch the ball!

Owens was sacrificed to second (in a 2-1 game, quite a reasonable move) and Jim Thome came to the plate. In what amounts to a tremendous vote of confidence, Borowski pitched to Thome with the bag open and got two quick strikes before nibbling his way to 3-2. The 3-2 pitch looked fat enough to swat out of the park, but Thome got under it and ended up with a sacrifice fly to right. (Technically, this is no longer a sac fly, but ... it was a sac fly.)

This intrigued me, but it was pointed out last night that walking Thome would have put the winning run on base, something good to avoid, to be sure. The Indians actually won a game earlier this season by way of this gambit. Still, Thome is a very good hitter (although not having a very good season), one quite capable of ending the game there with one swing. Borowski got him, so all was well, and kudos all around.

At this point, Paul Konerko worked the count before lifting a routine pop foul to the first base side. Here is an excerpt of the conversation between Garko and Martinez:

(chirp chirp)

Okay, I don't know if there were crickets in Not Comiskey Park, but it was hot and humid. They like that sort of thing. What Indians fans liked less was the fact that neither Garko nor Martinez deigned to catch the ball, and Konerko eventually walked instead of ending the game right there.

Fortunately, A.J. Pierzynski hit the next pitch as a soft liner to Josh Barfield to end the game.

There are many qualities that are helpful to a pitcher who wants to succeed in the role of closer. "Unflappability" may be the most important. ("Giant testicles" seem to run a close second.)

3) And the wind cries, "Strike three!"

Congratulations to Josh Barfield, a noted hacker with poor plate discipline, for drawing the team's only walk against John Danks and a parade of relievers I hate. Barfield struck out zero times, as did Victor Martinez, which makes them severe anomalies on last night's roster, where everyone else (including the halftime split of Jason Michaels and Kenny Lofton, each of whom got two plate appearances) struck out at least once.

Special huzzahs go to Franklin Gutierrez, who at least got a hit, and Ryan Garko, who at least did not injure any spectators, for striking out twice apiece. Huzzah!

4) Rally time!

In the fifth, Jhonny Peralta started with his nine hundred sixteenth hit to the opposite field (huzzah!) before watching F-Goot ("Hey, it's Franklin ! Comin' to strike out!") whiff. Jason Michaels followed with the World's Shortest Double and Barfield flew out.

It has been noted that Grady Sizemore is hitting left-handed pitching this season, but did you realize that he's hitting .290/.443/.419 with runners in scoring position and .320/.469/.480 with runners in scoring position and two outs? He's like the Anti-Blake. Sizemore lined a single the other way to left, and Scott Podsednik decided not to test Scott Podsednik's arm so that both runners scored.

I like Grady Sizemore.

5) Caution still reigns

Travis Hafner hit a double to the wall off the left-handed Danks. Hafner went 2-for-4 and has convinced me of absolutely nothing.

6) Silver Lining Dept.

Although Barfield did not get any hits, he did steal his 13th base of the season and had a couple of nice defensive plays at short. Since Asdrubal Cabrera is apparently a switch-hitter and played some second in the Mariners system, I wouldn't be surprised to see him get some of Barfield's plate appearances here over the next month or two, especially against right-handers. Given Barfield's struggles at the plate this season, this seems prudent. Still, the guy's only 24: we'll see how he looks next year.

7) Hey, we had one of those!

Kenny Lofton pinch-hit for Jason Michaels in the 7th and immediately meekly grounded out to the pitcher, Eric Wasserman, who is apparently in the major leagues. Given a second chance, Ozzie Guillen brought in left-hander Matt Thornton, and Lofton could not have looked more ridiculous striking out had he been wearing a Russell Branyan mask.

He looked bad.