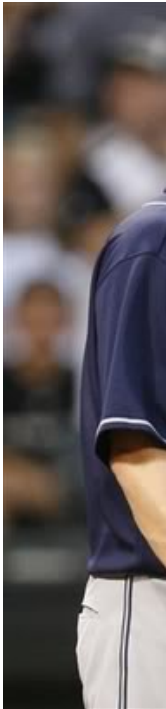


## The B-List: 8/9

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}  
Thursday, August 09 2007 7:00 PM -

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The Indians have had Mark Buehrle's number over the last couple years, and last night was no exception as the good guys touched up Buehrle and the White Sox for seven runs in the fourth and fifth innings en route to a 7-5 win. The win also was Aaron Laffey's (pictured) first big league win, and you know Buff has thoughts on his start in today's B-List. Happy 43rd Buff!



FINAL SCORE				
Indians (65-50)	0	0	0	5
White Sox (53-61)	0	2	1	0

*W: Laffey (1-1) L: Buehrle (9-7) S: Borowski (32)*

Obviously, the conclusion to draw is that Eric Wasserman and Ryan Bukvich are far superior pitchers to Mark Buehrle.

### 1) The toast of Beefalo

With the claim of Chris Gomez off waivers from the Orioles, rookie Aaron Laffey is being sent down to Beefalo today. This makes a certain amount of sense, in that Travis Hafner is unavailable and we have two off days next week. Hafner's knee injury, which sounds a lot like a cartilage problem to a 42-year-old (43 tomorrow! Woo woo!) guy with clicking knees from asphalt basketball (and to [Will Carroll](#), BTW), is likely to keep him out through the weekend, so another bat is more

important than a fifth starter than won't be needed until late August. Besides, it makes sense to keep Laffey in a regular rotation rhythm, and it'd be hard to argue for him over any of the other four.

This doesn't minimize the good feeling of Laffey's first major-league win, though. Although Laffey didn't really pitch all that great (5 2/3 IP, 5 H, 4 R, 3 BB, 4 K), there are enough signs there to think that he might have a future in the bigs. For one thing, unlike fellow Beefalo lefties Jeremy Sowers and Cliff Lee, Laffey has significant groundball stuff, posting a brisk 11:1 GB:FB ratio last night after a 10:3 ratio in his loss to the Twins. Laffey's game against the Twins was actually a little better, although virtually identical once the ineptitude of the Minnesota offense is taken in to account.

The strikeouts are different, as he only struck out one Twin. The strikeouts came primarily off a pitch described as a "slurve," and from what I could tell, only two of the four strikeouts involved strike three being in the strike zone. There's nothing wrong with that: lots of pitchers make a living off getting batters to swing at balls (split-finger pitchers come to mind). However, it bears mentioning in that as the league adjusts to Laffey, he will need to hit corners with those pitches or come up with another weapon: it was largely the inability of Fredo Cabrera to adjust to hitters laying off his slider out of the zone that resulted in his release with a five-and-a-half ERA. On the other hand, it also bears mentioning that Laffey is 22 and started the year in AA.

Overall, Laffey's 5.73 ERA and 5:4 K:BB ratio aren't going to send anyone rushing to the phones to anoint him the Next Big Thing, but there's promise there.

## 2) "I am not, as they say, a potted plant." - Dan Quayle

The catching position has been a bit of a sore sport: Kelly Shoppach hit .097 in July and hadn't had a hit in August, while Victor Martinez finally tired of carrying the Cleveland offense and has hit only .231 after the All-Star break. Martinez has

enough of a track record to worry little about: he might be tired, but he's obviously a tremendous hitter. Actually, after a lot of ill-founded worries about him wearing down last season, Martinez finished strongly, hitting .350 and posting a .500 SLG for the only month other than April. So who knows if he's worn down, or how long it would take him to recover from that? He hasn't been hitting recently, that's indisputable.

Playing DH in an effort to get the best of both worlds (hitting and exerting less), Martinez got hits his first three trips to the plate (single to the wall to left, single off the Buehrle up the middle, single through the hole to right) and was intentionally walked his fourth trip. He had a poor final at-bat, but that's still a very nice night at the plate and a reminder of just how good a hitter Martinez is.

Shoppach, on the other hand, doesn't have a track record to fall back on and doesn't play regularly enough to know what's going on. I mean, he plays every week as Byrd's catcher and making the odd other appearance, but the guy's the backup catcher. One thing Shoppach does have is power, though, as fully 15 of his 32 hits on the season have been for extra bases. Last night was certainly no exception, with a homer and a double added to the mix. The homer was really a great drive, a kind of inside-out power stroke that sailed over the right-field wall for the big blow of the game. I'm not about to declare Shoppach to be out of any slump (two hits does not constitute a hot streak) nor demand more playing time (he is still not Victor Martinez), but it sure was good to see some production there. After all, in a two-run game, a three-run homer looms pretty large ...

### **3) I, on the other hand, stand in soil and photosynthesize**

It's kind of a tough break that Franklin Gutierrez' hard smash was ruled an error by Josh Fields: it cost him an RBI and forced a 0-for-5 collar onto F-Goot. And really, it was up to the scorer's discretion as which side of the fence to land on, so it's kind of a shame for Gutierrez that the scorer picked the obviously correct one. (I expect the play to show up on YouTube with a sound track from a bullfight.)

When Gutierrez was not forcing Fields to look like a player wearing handcuffs, though, he was busy memorializing the career of the recently-departed-from-the-Indians Russell Branyan, who spent a grand total of 36 hours in the Indians' system this time before being sold to Philadelphia. Branyan was known for his prodigious whiffing capability, and Gutierrez did him proud with three more last night. (All three were swinging.) I don't know if Gutierrez is pressing, but after two months of high-800s OPSs, Gutierrez is hitting .207/.233/.276 in August with 11 strikeouts already this month. That's not helpful.

#### **4) Nice hose!**

Jason Michaels gunned down noted speedster A.J. Pierzynski trying to advance to third from first on a single to left.

That kind of tells you the respect Michaels' arm has earned over the years, though. Jim Thome scored from second on the play, and Jermaine Dye had scored from second on an earlier single to left. Bleah.

#### **5) Very, very bad hitting**

In the first, with runners on first and third and one out, Ryan Garko did one of the three things you simply cannot do with a runner on third and fewer than two outs: he popped up to the infield, and we did not score.

Not to be outdone, the 8<sup>th</sup> inning off Ryan Bukvich started with a double by Shoppach (again to right, huzzah) and a 2-strike single by Josh Barfield. So, first and third, no one out.

Grady Sizemore took ball one, fouled off ball two, swung and missed ball three, then watched the first strike Bukvich threw him sailed through the heart of the strike zone to do one of the three things you simply cannot do with a runner on third and fewer than two outs.

Inspired by this, Casey Blake watched strike one, fouled off strike two, and simply missed strike three.

Inspired by this, Victor Martinez watched two quick strikes, took a pair of balls, and swung and missed strike three.

(In case you're wondering, the third thing is to drop your trousers and moon the umpire. Same net effect.)

## **6) The seasoned veterans take over from Laffey.**

Aaron Laffey may have been making only his second start, but virtual greybeards Jensen Lewis and Rafael Perez were called out to bridge the gap from Laffey to Lord Joe. Lewis induced a pair of flyouts, then struck out Jerry Owens and Josh Fields to end the 7<sup>th</sup>. Perez threw 9 strikes in 13 pitches, striking out one and getting both left-handers (Thome, Pierzynski) to ground out to second.

It's a bit of a shame to have used Perez again after he went 2

2/3 the night before, especially with the Yankees coming up ... but he sure is good.

## 7) Ducks on the pond!

In addition to the innings outlined above, the Indians squandered numerous other opportunities to score, leaving 9 on base and a horrific SIX in scoring position. On the plus side, the stranding was a real team effort, with Blake, Garko, Gutierrez, Martinez, Shoppach, and Peralta each stranding one.

Wait, that's not a *plus*. Forget I mentioned it.

It was kind of nice to strand baserunners in that it meant we had baserunners, though.

## 8) Box Score Follies

Every Cleveland hitter in the lineup had a higher batting average than his Chicago counterpart, both in terms of batting

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order and position.