

The B-List: 8/14

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
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Buff is angry, and rightfully so after last night's debacle against the Tigers. The Indians were 0-10 with runners in scoring position, struck out fourteen times, and had a runner on second with no one out in the bottom of the ninth and the score tied at two and failed to score him. And predictably, the Tigers pasted four runs on us in the tenth for the win. Buff vents in today's B-List.



FINAL SCORE

| | | | | |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Tigers (66-53) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Indians (65-54) | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

W: Rodney (2-5) L: Borowski (2-5)

I would like to take this opportunity to announce that I am considering a different writing project, one entitled, "Clydemnestra and the Cabbage Rolls." It is a series of short stories for children about a boy who overcomes gender confusion to study for and pass his seven Actuarial Exams in order to work for a large insurance agency in Topeka, Kansas. Each story will talk about the wonders and fascinating depth that lurk within the intertwined relationship between actuaries and the complex world of insurance. The cabbage rolls will be every bit as interesting as they are tasty, redolent of the odors of wet sock and boiled beef. It will be an allegory of some sort, and be written entirely in words of prime-number-length not containing the letter "U."

I mention this because I feel this will be a more interesting and rewarding proposition than writing about the Cleveland @#%*ing Indians. At least the cabbage rolls give a shit. (As it were.)

1) The Hero's Tragic Flaw, or Finishing What You Started

One of my birthday presents was a DVD collection of "Rocky and Bullwinkle," an old cartoon in serial format in which each episode ended with the narrator telling you what was coming up in the next episode with two terrible puns. (Actually, it did no such thing, but it did provide the writers an opportunity to unleash two terrible puns.) I do not have two terrible puns to unleash, but it explains the format of the heading.

C.C. Sabathia generally avoided the patented Inning of Crap this time out, where the closest thing was his last inning, the 7th, in which back-to-back hits resulted in Detroit's second run that effectively ended Cleveland's hopes. Still, two hits and one run is hardly a real IoC. Overall, Sabathia spun a fine performance, going 7 full innings with 8 strikeouts against 1 walk and 7 hits. He gave up one run on a double and a pair of groundouts, and threw only 96 pitches through the 7 innings. Admittedly, the Tigers are a bit of a free-swinging bunch, but with 8 strikeouts, you expect a higher pitch count.

This start actually contrasted with the modal performance for Sabathia this season, in which he normally has some sort of IoC in the middle of the game, gets jarred into action, and finishes very strong. I suppose the argument could be made that given another inning he could have turned this start into something of that kind, but there was no reason to do so, and Raffy Betancourt could hardly have pitched better in relief, anyway. No, the "what if" factor from this start comes primarily from its beginning:

Granderson: Strike (swinging), Strike (looking), Ball, Strike (swinging)
Raburn: Strike (looking), line out
Sheffield: Strike (foul), Ball, Strike (foul), Foul, Ball, Strike (swinging)□

Let me take this opportunity to say, "Who the f@#% is Ryan Raburn?" But seriously, Granderson is one of the brightest young rising stars in the game, one who has arguably passed Grady Sizemore on his way up, and Sheffield remains one of the most dangerous hitters regardless of his struggles this season (he has "struggled" to a .284/.388/.510 line). Did you know that Gary Sheffield has 18 steals this season? The man is 38. Fortunately, he has never **knowingly** done any performance-enhancing drugs.

In any event, the second inning was a 1-2-3 affair on 6 pitches. The third featured Detroit's first baserunner, a walked Omar Infante. Detroit did not get a hit until Magglio Ordonez laced a two-out single to center in the 4th. That's a pretty damned good start for Sabathia.

A microcosm of the difference between Jim Leyland's Tigers and Eric Wedge's Indians was illustrated by the 6th, though, in which Raburn led off with a double. Sheffield then grounded out, but advanced Raburn to third. Ordonez grounded out, but this scored Raburn.

You see, it is one thing to go 0-for-10 with runners in scoring position, but you don't even need to get hits to score runs with a guy in scoring position. All you have to do is make some f@#%ing contact that doesn't involve a guy getting doubled off base with his head up his ass, or

a guy getting picked off with the bases loaded, or simply whiffing three times.

Anyway, Sabathia pitched well, but in a game in which he was clearly not going to get more help from his offense than the two-run "outburst" in the opening inning, instead of "stepping up" to continue the dominant success of the first three innings, Sabathia loped to the finish line giving up two runs and effectively losing the game. Is this fair? Of course not. Is he supposed to be the stopper, the Ace, the *n'est plus ultra*? I thought so. I guess not.

2) Ducks on the goddam pond!

Did I mention that the Indians went 0-for-10 with runners in scoring position? That's pretty f@#%ing lame. I mean, really hugely lame. You may have seen it: I haven't found a writeup of the game that doesn't include this nugget thrust jauntily into every Cleveland fan's face. Ho ho! Won't they get a kick out of that?

But look, this is both less and more significant than it may appear. 0-for-10 makes it sound like a huge team-wide problem, an offensive outage of epic proportions. That's a bit misleading. The Indians had 12 baserunners last night, on 6 hits, 5 walks, and a hit batsman.

Seven of the 12 baserunners were Casey Blake and Grady Sizemore.

There were no runners in scoring position until the 7th inning.

There were no baserunners whatsoever in innings 2, 4, and 5, and Sizemore was caught stealing second in the 6th.

No, what we're talking about here is a few isolated incidents: after a double in the 7th, Peralta grounded out and Barfield watched

strike three. With Sizemore on second in the 8th

, Martinez windmilled and Hafner hit a looping liner. After a double in the 9th

, Peralta, Gutierrez, and Barfield all struck out swinging. And in the 10th

, Sizemore grounded out, Martinez windmilled again, and Hafner grounded out.

Here's why this is disturbing: first off, the sheer number of whiffs is almost inconceivable. Jeremy Bonderman had been struggling mightily with a double-digit ERA and several very poor outings recently, and we made him look like Sweatin' Bob Wolcott. Martinez, Peralta, and Barfield each struck out three times. Three times! Of the ten outs listed about, six are

strikeouts, and five were swinging! And most troubling to me, four of the outs were made by our titular Big Gun Run Producers, Martinez and Hafner.

There's a limited amount to be done if your hitters don't hit. If none of Victor Martinez, Travis Hafner, nor Jhonny Peralta is capable of putting the ball hard into play (Hafner whiffed twice, BTW), we're simply going to lose.

3) A game of inches

Lest I be considered a pure homer, Curtis Granderson made a very fine catch of

Hafner's sinking liner to center with runners on 1st and 2nd in the 8th, a catch that essentially won the game for the Tigers. There's a lot of reconstructive what-iffing there, but it should be noted that Chris Gomez led off the next inning with a double. But even if that hit hadn't padded the lead, Joe Borowski would have been brought in to face the BOTTOM of the Detroit lineup, where he probably would have been more successful. (What am I talking about, how could he have been LESS successful?)

But it was a nice catch. Kudos.

4) Managerial Head-Scratchers

Oh, gracious, where to start?

Well, the most obvious gaffe was the double-substitution in the transition from the 7th to the 8th. Ryan Garko laced a one-out double in the bottom of the 7th

, and recent pickup Chris Gomez was called on to pinch-run. Now, pinch-running for Ryan Garko is the "gimme" on the managerial exam, the 400 points for spelling your name correctly on the SAT. Of COURSE you pinch-run for Ryan Garko. Ryan Garko runs in the manner of those toy robots you put together from the hobby store, the kind where the leg baaaaaaarely clears over the top of its

arc before making a complete step.

But Chris Gomez ... well, let's just say he was not my first choice.

Who was my first choice? Well, of the remaining bench players, I'd say that Franklin Gutierrez was probably the fastest player. Of course, Gutierrez can't play first base, so I suppose that's why Gomez was called out. I mean, it's not like Gutierrez could go out into right field or anything.

Oh, wait, that's exactly what he did in the top of the 8th.

That's right: had Wedge pinch-run Gutierrez for Garko, he could have pulled Nixon at the END of the inning, then brought Gomez in for Garko and Gutierrez in for Nixon. It's just that the batting order would have gone Gutierrez-Peralta-Gomez instead of Gomez-Peralta-Gutierrez. Yeah, THAT'S worth having the slower runner in scoring position.

Now, let's harken back to the Minnesota series:

Peralta had two strikes on the pitch, and Wedge had taken down the bunt signal.□ But Peralta went for it anyway.

"He has a lot of confidence in his ability and he should, because he's a good bunter," Wedge said.

Gomez led off the ninth inning with a double. Jhonny Peralta stepped to the plate with no outs and a man on second in a tie game in which one run wins the game.

Jhonny Peralta did not bunt.

Now, this is good news, insofar as Jhonny Peralta is an awful bunter. This is bad news, in that it illustrates that Eric Wedge doesn't even believe the words coming out

of his own mouth. Oddly enough, I don't believe the words coming out of his mouth, either.

Now, as for the decision to bring Borowski out to face the top of the lineup ... eh, I wouldn't have done it, but at least I understand it. Who would I have brought out? Perez, of course: Granderson is left-handed, Raburn is ... look, I have no f#%*ing clue who Raburn is, okay? And Sheffield has absolutely zero platoon split (.278/.924 against lefties, .286/.890

against righties), so it hardly matters. The objective thing is that Perez is simply a better pitcher than Borowski, and I'd rather the better pitcher face their best hitters. Is that really rocket science?

5) Lost in the shuffle

Grady Sizemore went 2-for-3 with 2 walks. One of the hits was the two-run homer out of the 3 hole. That, I admit, was an interesting

idea to let Lofton lead off and put Sizemore in a run-producing slot, and it paid immediate dividends. But any way you slice it, that's a good night at the plate.

Gomez and Garko both doubled. Fat lot of good it did 'em.

Casey Blake walked twice and scored a run.

Jhonny Peralta and Josh Barfield each hit a fair ball.

6) Nice Hose!

Grady Sizemore's brilliant throw in the top of the 10th helped gun down Ivan Rodriguez at the plate trying to score from second on a double.

This brilliant defensive play prevented a 6-2 blowout from becoming a 7-2 laugher.

7) Hey, we had one of those!

Tim Byrdak pitched a hitless 8th, walking two, but striking out 2 as well. You may remember Byrdak from his stint in the Cleveland system. (You probably don't.)

8) Ho Hum Dept.

Raffy Betancourt pitched two scoreless innings of 1-hit ball. He struck out 3 and threw 17 strikes in 19 pitches. I like Raffy.