

The B-List: 8/24-8/26

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As the Tigers took two of three from the Yankees (all the more reason to hate the Yankees), Cleveland kept pace by winning two of the three games in the weekend series with KC. Buff recaps the weekend, swooning over various pitching performances, and noting the difference between a crushing loss and an elating win isn't really very great.



FINAL SCORE				
Indians (70-57)	0	0	0	0
Royals (57-70)	0	0	0	1

W: Bale (1-1) L: Sabathia (14-7) S: Soria (14)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (71-57)	5	2	0	0
Royals (57-71)	0	0	0	0

W: Laffey (2-1) L: Davies (1-3)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (72-57)	0	1	0	0
Royals (57-72)	0	0	0	0

W: Betancourt (3-0) L: Jo. Peralta (0-1) S: Borowski (37)

You know, guys, it's okay to win the *first* game of a series, too.

1) Two tales of two innings

In the 8th inning of one game, the Indians squandered a golden opportunity to tie a one-run game when they had a man on third and one out. The next batter (Kenny Lofton) struck out (pretty much the only non-run-producing thing you can do), and the following hitter made an out to end the inning. Much wailing and gnashing of teeth ensued.

In the following frame, a runner was advanced to second, but given two chances to tie the score off the Royals' closer, the Indians failed and went home (well, back to the hotel, I suppose) losers of a tight game.

In the 8th inning of another game, the Indians squandered a golden opportunity to tie a one-run game when they had a man on third and two outs. The next batter (Kenny Lofton) flied out to end the inning. Hair shirts were passed out and self-flagellation became the order of the day.

In the following fram, a runner was advanced to second, and given only one chance to drive him home, the batter did on the first pitch he saw. Of course, the next batter didn't drive in HIS runner from second, but the positive momentum and intangibility factor was ratcheted up to enough of an extreme to result in an eventual win in extra innings.

So here is the difference between a soul-crushing

we-never-do-anything-right can't-produce-in-the-clutch
gonna-miss-the-playoffs team and an uplifting can-do
destined-for-success tide-turning statement-game
look-out-world-here-we-come team: one ball hit to center field
instead of shortstop. The two teams were equally incompetent
in the 8th inning: it wasn't just the same team, it was essentially
the **same guys** doing the **exact same things**, but one
hit by one guy essentially turns a grotesque belly-knot of a loss
into a euphoric spring-step of a win. That's the distance. From
near the bottom of the ball to the middle, about an inch.

Some game, huh?

2) (Expletive deleted)

I'm not frustrated.□ That's just baseball.

-- C.C. Sabathia

I sure do applaud Sabathia saying this in public. It must
take an enormous amount of restraint and
professionalism to come out in front of dozens of
microphones if your face, secretly hoping that they get to

be the first to record your profanity-laced tirade as you pull a 12-gauge from your locker and begin waving it around, telling everyone within shouting distance that things are gonna be different around here from now on, boy howdy.

Because I don't care what Sabathia says, he **is** frustrated because he is a human being. He may be less frustrated than you or I am, because he's a mature professional, but come on. Be serious.

In previous columns, I have been erring on the side of the offense: as well as Sabathia has pitched, he hasn't pitched a shutout, he hasn't been entirely dominant, there's room for him to get one of those wins. Well, screw that. The offense is performing pitifully for Sabathia and that really blows. Sabathia gave up 5 hits in 8 innings, walking 2 and striking out 6. He gave up two runs, neither of which was driven in by a hit. Now, the first run is Vintage F*#\$up, where you walk the leadoff man AND give up an extra-base hit. When the run scores on a groundout, well, you deserved that one, pitch better. But the second run was scored without ANYONE getting a hit: HBP, passed ball, sacrifice bunt, sac fly. On

the one hand, that's a nice "manufactured run" by the Royals, and heck, a fly ball like that in the 8th for Cleveland and the game is going to extra innings. On the other hand, that seems about as close to "snakebit" as you can get without suffering a puncture wound.

Two of the Royals' five hits were doubles, which will be interesting later, and suggests a higher level of dominance is possible, but that's still a very good start, Sabathia's seventh in a row in which he allowed no more than 2 earned runs. For counters, Sabathia is now at 197 innings for the season: at 27, he's past the so-called Injury Nexus and rarely goes over 110 pitches in any single outing. He seemed strong enough in his 8th inning; does that mean there's no concern? Well, not "no" concern, I guess, but not "a lot," either.

3) *Swoon*

We all have our pet things: for me, I like relievers who throw strikes and pitchers with either a high GB:FB ratio or a high K rate. Aaron Laffey's third start of the season did not get off to an auspicious beginning:

German: Ball, Ball, Ball, Strike (looking),
groundout
DeJesus: Ball, Ball, Ball, Ball

For those of you scoring at home, that's 2 strikes in 9 pitches, which in most scouting circles is judged to be "crappy" on a one-to-crappy scale. However, the next batter grounded out, and the one after that struck out.

This became a theme on the day for Mr. Laffey: in all Laffey induced 14 ground balls, including

3 double plays, and struck out 4 hitters in 6 complete innings. Now, he also gave up 8 hits, 1 walk, 1 HBP, 2 runs, and had a 52:41 strike-to-ball ratio. That's not really terrific work, although 2 runs in 6 innings, I'll take that from my fifth starter. But if you're counting at home, in 6 innings there are 18 outs, and Laffey got 14 GB + 4 K. That makes ... hm, carry the three ... ah, yes, ZERO fly ball outs.

Now, part of the reason I like groundball pitchers is that it's hard to hit a ground ball home run. In fact, it's hard to hit a ground ball extra-base hit, although obviously balls hit down the line are normally doubles: of Laffey's 8 hits, 8 of them were singles. It's difficult to have a big inning against a guy who only gives up singles. It's certainly not impossible, and heck, four "non-big" innings giving up one or two runs in a row and you've dug a pretty deep hole. But Laffey did what he needed to

do to be successful, and right now I can't object to giving him the ball every fifth day.

It should be pointed out that Laffey had something before he even stepped on the mound that few other Cleveland starters have had at any point recently: a 5-run lead. It's probably less stressful to pitch with such a thing. Just a guess.

4) Speaking of sinkers

Fausto Carmona really didn't have a great start: 10 hits in 6 innings is butting up against the Nagy/Byrd Limit of Nibble Management. He only struck out 2 guys, walked one, and didn't get anyone to ground into a double play.

However, like Laffey, all of Carmona's hits were limited to one base. In addition, Carmona was helped by Victor Martinez throwing out Alex Gordon trying to steal, and picked off Esteban German as well. So in terms of damage control, Carmona did what he had to do to limit the Royals to 3 runs on those 10 hits.

I wouldn't read much into Carmona not being sent out to pitch the 7th with only 90 pitches under his belt: he obviously wasn't particularly sharp, and three of the next four batters (DeJesus, Gload, Gordon) were left-handed, suggesting that Raffy Perez would be perfectly happy to take over from that point. (He was.)

5) Dept. of Raffies

I'm sorry, I hope I didn't use up all my Swoon Points talking about Aaron Laffey. I mean, some ground ball outs, yes, yes, it's very nice, but the closest score he pitched with was 5-0. There's only a certain amount of cachet to be had under such circumstances.

Raffy Perez, on the other hand, came in with the job of preserving a one-run deficit in the slim hope that the offense could actually score a goddam run, and did so with aplomb, giving up a hit and a walk in two scoreless innings. Perez actually put both guys on in the 7th, but polished off the Royals in order in the 8th

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Raffy Betancourt, on the third hand, came in with the score tied in the bottom of the ninth. In his two perfect innings of work, he struck out three, including the last two swinging, and threw 18 strikes in 22 pitches.

Trying something new, our closer changed his name to Raffy Borowski, and got through a 1-2-3 11th in 8 pitches. Having used Perez and Betancourt, it is hoped that Raffy Lewis, Raffy Fultz, and Raffy Mastny will be up to the task of protecting any leads we might have against the Twins Monday.

6) Drooby Doo!

You know, it's natural to watch Asdrubal Cabrera play and wonder why he wasn't on the team instead of Josh Barfield in the first place, so it bears noting that part of the REASON that Cabrera looks so comfortable and is having such success is BECAUSE he wasn't on the team instead of Josh Barfield in the first place. Cabrera had a TERRIBLE time in the Seattle system and was nothing like ready for the big leagues last fall. It made all the sense in the world to have him hone his skills in Beefalo for a while.

Well, consider them honed. Cabrera is hitting .318/.340/.477 in his brief time in Cleveland: admittedly, that is in 44 ABs and the plate discipline is not really easily-distinguished from Barfield at this point, but Drooby Doo has been a tremendously valuable player, playing fluid defense and collecting 5 hits this weekend, including the triple mentioned above and hits in each of the three games. In addition, Cabrera looks comfortable in the 2 slot, which puts more speed at the top of the lineup and allows the struggling Casey Blake to ply his trade lower in the order (in this case, ninth).

But c'mon! You don't care about any of that! You care that Asdrubal Cabrera, of all the Cleveland Indians, actually came through with a run-producing hit ... with two outs ... in the ninth inning ... of a one-run game! Woo hoo!

7) Well, that's good too, after all

Of course, Cabrera's heroics were only "heroic" because we won the game. And we won that game because Travis Hafner and Victor Martinez, players who have

struggled recently, came through with two-out singles of their own. In fact, Cabrera made the second out of the inning, so it's not like he's flawless.

8) In rebuttal

Bite me! Cabrera rules!

9) Comfort Zone

Casey Blake in the two hole: 0-for-4, 1 K, 3 LOB (2 in scoring position).

Casey Blake in the nine hole: 4-for-8 with 2 RBI (including one with two outs!), 1 R, 1 sacrifice, and 3 LOB (1 in scoring position).

I have a suggestion.

Along these lines, consider the Sizemore-Cabrera-Hafner 1-2-3 to be preferable to the

Lofton-Blake-Sizemore one up and down the line. Sorry, Kenny.

10) I'm not dead yet!

Aaron Fultz, Jensen Lewis, and Tom Mastny pitched! (Well in Fultz' case, okay in Lewis', poorly in Mastny's)

There's something to be said for keeping these guys sharp and not overworking the Raffies, namely, that you should keep these guys sharp

and not overwork the Raffies. (This, of course, is easier said than done, in that it's also nice to actually win the games, and this generally means using Raffies.)

11) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro has been making phone calls to parents of school-age children, impersonating a School Board Official and telling them that the start of the school year will be delayed by one month. There isn't a parent I

know who doesn't know the INSTANT their children are supposed to be in school, so this wouldn't work even if it were true, which it's not. Fire Eric Wedge.