

## The B-List: 8/30

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There's nothing more exciting than the game-winning walk-off ... walk! Thanks to a great piece of not hitting by Kenny Lofton, the Indians took a 6-5 win over the Mariners, bailing out a tired Joe Borowski and extending Cleveland's win streak to 6. The B-List addresses Aaron Laffey's development, the 2-out clutchness, and expresses an opinion on the quality of Horacio Ramirez' &quot;pickoff move.&quot; Bring on the ChiSox!



FINAL SCORE				
Mariners (73-59)	0	0	0	0
Indians (76-57)	0	3	0	0

&quot;W&quot;; Borowski (3-5) L: O'Flaherty(7-1)

I tend to watch the Indians in exactly the opposite manner to an NBA game: most of an NBA game is unwatchable until the very end, whereas with Joe Borowski as closer, only the very end of an Indians game is unwatchable.

### 1) Freed from the burden of expectation, the mundane encourages

I'll admit, when Aaron Laffey was first summoned to take a place in the starting rotation, I viewed him as not much more than a stopgap, a placeholder because the rules say you can't use a pitching machine. Actually, I'll admit that I didn't know Aaron Laffey from a random guy on a Mentos commercial, although he was probably less overtly European. I knew he was left-handed. (There's a capital L next to his name.)

Then when Laffey began throwing ground balls like nobody's business and won two of his first three starts, I honestly went into last night's game with the expectation that he would win: the Mariners just got swept by the Angels, then flew cross-country, to play in Jacobs Field where the Indians have a very good record, and went against conventional wisdom in starting Horacio Ramirez instead of a starting pitcher. I'll admit that this is a bold move by the Mariners, but not as bold as, say, ironing your shirt while still wearing it, or letting Mike Rouse play games that count in the standings.

I guess the point is that, objectively, Aaron Laffey's performance against the Mariners could hardly be called spectacular, or even clearly successful: he gave up 4 runs in 6 1/3 innings, yielding seven hits including rookie Adam Jones' first major-league home run, a solo shot in the 6<sup>th</sup>. His season ERA stands at 5.01, and a large part of that is that he becomes a lot more hittable as the game progresses. Before tonight, Laffey held opponents to a .233/.361/.233 line in the first three innings, but this ballooned to a .364/.400/.545 line in innings 4-6. Hey, it's three games, you can't attach real meaningful meaning to almost ANY stat, but it's something to watch out for. (I think his GB% is significant, since it mimics numbers he posted in the minors are they're so severe.)

Last night, for example, Laffey was on cruise control, coasting through the first five innings with only two hits allowed (one a double) and one of those baserunners was erased on a double play. Four of the innings involved three batters, and the third through fifth were perfect. His pitch count was miniscule, and his GO:FO ratio was 10:2. That's about as good as a guy can pitch, really, and it almost goes without saying that he'd allowed zero runs (and zero walks, BTW).

In the sixth, though, he gave up Jones' homer and another run on a double and a single. And in the 7<sup>th</sup>, another double and single sandwiched around an out spelled the end of Laffey's night. Again, the samples are terribly small and it's unreasonable to draw real, concrete

conclusions from a couple hits, but Laffey has some developing to do before he can be considered a full-time rotation mainstay.

## 2) Break out the Rally Pillow!

Remember, kids, with a tie score in the bottom of the ninth, the key is to do nothing.

After Travis Hafner grounded out, Victor Martinez laced a nice single to leftoff left-hander Eric O'Flaherty. O'Flaherty has been a nice surprise for the Mariners, fading a bit over the summer after a hot start, but still sporting a pretty good 3.60 ERA. In fact, the Mariners' bullpen has really been their strongest feature this season, especially with how lamely the starting rotation has performed: just last night, Sean Green has a 3.49 ERA, George Sherrill has a 2.31, and Brandon Morrow sports a 3.17. That's four pretty good relief pitchers, none older than 30, with O'Flaherty and Morrow ages 22 and 23 respectively. Nice setup there.

Anyway, O'Flaherty, who may have the most Irish name in the bigs, managed to hit Ryan Garko with a 0-2 pitch, putting two men on base. Rick White was summoned to face the righties, and got Jhonny Peralta to line out before simply walking

## Franklin Gutierrez on four pitches.

After going to a full count to Kenny Lofton, who had replaced Jason Michaels earlier in the game, Lofton spoiled a borderline pitch by poking it foul, then watched as White's last offering was deemed too high and tight. Of the four players involved in scoring a run, there were a total of two productive swings, and one of those was a foul ball. White managed to give up a run without allowing any hits and getting a non-productive out from the only fair ball hit off him.

### **3) Hey, that's stupid!**

Of course, this is because White threw 5 strikes in 15 pitches and was generally awful. And there's a reason for this: because Rick White is generally awful. Remember all those youngish relief pitchers with the sub-4 ERAs I listed above? Rick White certainly doesn't fit on that list: he is 38 and sports a 5.79 ERA. That's just in the A.L., where White has made four appearances: on the SEASON (begun with the Astros), his ERA is 7.41 and his WHIP is 1.82. White did not pitch from June 26 to August 25, having been put on the B.L. (Bad List) with Inflammation of the Suck. He's 38! His ERA was 7.67! Why would you acquire this guy?!

But more importantly, why would you USE this guy in that situation? He is your fifty-third most effective relief pitcher. Ichiro Suzuki would be a better choice. The Moose would arguably be a similar choice (it's easy to steal off the Mariner Moose: his peripheral vision is terrible). But more reasonably, Uber Closer J.J. Putz, he of the 1.35 ERA and 0.68 WHIP, last pitched 8/24. That's a whole week ago! I understand that it wasn't a Save Situation ... but it sure as hell wasn't a Rick White Situation. There's orthodoxy, there's cutting off your nose to spite your face, and then there's using Washed Up White in a tie game on the road with men on base. That's just ludicrous.

#### **4) Lost in translation**

Martinez' hit was his third on the night. He also drove in his 94<sup>th</sup> run on the season.

#### **5) Super Clutchness Action!**

Of the Indians' six runs last night, six were scored with two outs.

Included in the hit parade were a two-run single by Jason Michaels, who hadn't played since 8/23, a run-scoring single by Chris Gomez, who is hitting .360 as a Cleveland Indian, hits by Martinez and Garko, and the walk by Lofton.

## **6) Somewhat Less Super Duck-Leaving Action**

On the other hand, the Indians left 12 men on base, including 5 in scoring position. Asdrubal Cabrera left two of these, and 5 men total in taking an 0-for-5 collar. Jhonny Peralta got a hit to go 1-for-5, but also left two in scoring position and left **6** men total. (Jason Michaels left one, but the man was 2-for-3 and drove in two runs, I'm more inclined to shrug that one off.)

## **7) Extremely Less Super Closing Action**

The obvious jibe is to rant and wail about how much Joe Borowski sucks. Frankly, that's not terribly interesting, but it's also not terribly accurate. True, Borowski blew

the save last night, but the run scored on a walk, a bloop single, a bunt, and a chopper that bounced over Borowski's leap on its way to almost getting all the way to second base. It's a run, and it tied the game, but it's not like he got pounded or pitched like Rick White.

Here's the thing: we're been playing a lot of close games, and this was Borowski's 4<sup>th</sup> appearance in 5 days, including the third straight. Did he look sharp to you? Should he have? (Borowski is only 2 years younger than White, although with far less beard.) If Borowski looked like he was struggling out there, maybe it's because it's August 30 and he's pitching a lot.

Here's a situation where it might make sense to look at giving someone else a shot at a save there: we caught lightning in a bottle last season with Mastny, and although he's clearly lost Eric Wedge's trust (which is more a reflection on Mastny than Wedge), Jensen Lewis has an oddball delivery (like Mastny did), can hump it up there (a few mph faster than Mastny did), and has a high K rate (like, but even better than, Mastny did). He's not so good with

runners on base, but starting out the ninth inning might be taking advantage of his jerky windup and deceptive delivery. And, of course, I love Ks from my back-end relievers.

I'm not saying that Lewis should REPLACE Borowski, but rather, on nights when Borowski could use a blow ... well, maybe it's worth thinking about giving him one, yeah?

**8) No, Officer, I'm sure it said 0.0799894, not 0.08**

The Indians left 12 men on base, and the reason they didn't leave more is because both Jason Michaels and Grady Sizemore were "caught stealing." Of course, the caught, Johjima, is nowhere to be found in the description of the plays.

That's because instead of being gunned down, both players were picked off by a very deceptive move by left-hander Horacio Ramirez. How deceptive?

Well, let's say this: Eric Wedge had no argument with the umpires about the move that picked off Sizemore. (This is because he had been thrown out in the previous inning for arguing that Michaels had been picked off on a balk.)

I pass no judgement on left-handers' balk moves, having called Andy Pettitte for roughly 9,386 balks in my career watching him.

## **9) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine**

Mark Shapiro invented Daylight Savings Time, then

travelled around Indiana so that it would be applied differently in each county. He is currently lobbying Congress to split the year into six different Savings Times in 15-minute incremental changes. Since DST was implemented before Shapiro was born, this contention is rather unlikely. Fire Eric Wedge.