

## The B-List: 9/21-9/23

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}  
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It was a big weekend and a big Sunday for the Indians. Not only did they become the first team in baseball to clinch their division, but they did it in their final home game of the season. In the Monday edition of The B-List, Buff recaps the weekend set with the A's and tackles the question all Indians fans are debating right now: Paul Byrd or Jake Westbrook in game three?



<del>FINALE</del>				
Athletics (74-81)	0	1	0	0
Indians (91-62)	0	0	1	0

*W: Carmona (18-8) L: Blanton (14-10) S: Borowski (43)*

<del>FINALE</del>				
Athletics (75-81)	0	2	0	1
Indians (91-63)	0	0	0	0

*W: Haren (15-8) L: Byrd (15-7)*

**FINAL SCORE**

<b>Athletics (75-82)</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Indians (92-63)</b>	0	2	0	4

*W: Westbrook (6-9) L: Braden (1-8) S: Betancourt (2)*

Ladies and gentlemen, your 2007 AL Central Champion Cleveland Indians!

**1) In this corner**

Jake Westbrook took the mound Sunday knowing that the Magic Number for clinching the Division (and hence a playoff spot: there was no truly plausible Wild Card scenario for the Indians) was down to one thanks to the loss by the Tigers on Saturday night. Although it would be possible to clinch the playoff berth without winning (if Detroit had lost Sunday), it would be a lot cleaner and more satisfying to simply win the last regular-season game in Jacobs Field in 2007. (There is one "home game" left: it will be played in Seattle, which is a lot like Cleveland except for the fans and the culture and the time zone and the size and the ocean and the 3000 miles.)

To this end, the Indians sent Jake Westbrook, one of the more statistically-unlikely #3 starters for a potential playoff team in recent memory. For one thing, he came in with a winning percentage on the season of .357. That's not all his fault: he's lost a couple games with poor run support and missed a number of starts on the DL, but facts is facts: how many times does a playoff team roll in with a starter (whom it expects to use regularly) with a sub-.400 winning percentage? After all, playoff teams tend to have pretty good records, which normally correlates to their starters having good records, too.

Westbrook has been what we sabermetricians call in technical terms, &quot;pretty good.&quot; In his last ten starts (including this one), he's given up 3 or fewer earned runs 8 times, including 5 of 2 total runs or fewer. On the other hand, in his past five starts (again including this one), he'd given up at least 4 total runs in 4 of them, and only lasted 5 innings in two of those. Three of the past six starts featured double-digit hits. His average number of walks almost exactly matches his modal number, two (in six of the ten starts). If there is one encouraging thing in his recent performances, it is that he sported a K/IP rate of at least 0.8 in 4 of his past 5 starts, which is unusually high from Jake, but always helps. (His K/BB ratio on the season is still a lousy 1.63.)

Westbrook showed pretty much all the features of Jake Westbrook in Sunday's victory: he went deepish into the game, needing 114 pitches to get through 7 complete innings. He posted an ordinary (for him) GO:FO ratio of 9:4, including including two double plays. He walked two guys and gave up a home run on a Very Very Bad Sinker That Didn't Sink. The two things he did that were unusually good were give up only 4 hits and struck out a career-high 9 guys.

At this point in the season, you have to think that Westbrook would give you a solid playoff start, but probably needs four or five runs worth of support, which can be hard to come by in the playoffs. He's certainly capable of throwing better (as evidenced by the 8 shutout innings 8/23 in Detroit), but equally capable of throwing worse (as evidenced by the brisk twelve-hitter against Detroit 9/18, or the two-homer 5-run effort the start before in Chicago). I actually like Westbrook

throwing that sinker in cold weather, stinging opposing batters' hands, but Jake's not going to give you that "I pity the fools" feeling you'd get from trotting out a top-notch starter.

## 2) And in this corner

Every so often, you will see a middle-distance runner who is trying to set a record in some international meet, and he will bring along his custom-groomed stable of "rabbits" to help him set a blistering early pace. These "rabbits" will come out and run faster than they are capable of sustaining for an entire race, sacrificing themselves to the record-setting effort of the main runner. Once they get their laps in, they step aside, and may or may not finish the race, and you don't care, because, really, it's track. Has track been interesting since the Olympics were special? Can you name three 1500m runners? There's the little guy, and the malnourished guy, and that other guy from the country in Africa, and John Hnat. That's about it.

Anyway, in contrast to Jake Westbrook, Paul Byrd has an outstanding winning percentage, better than the team itself. Heck, he even has a better WHIP than Westbrook. He has a more-recent dominant performance (complete-game shutout 9/1), and more of them (also a shutout 8/6 and a 1-run 6-IP outing 8/17). But whereas Westbrook's ERA has gone from 5.00 to 4.32 over his past ten starts, Byrd's has gone from 4.27 to 4.79, or 4.55, depending on whether you believe ESPN's stats or ESPN's stats. (Seriously, it's on the same page. Please tell me how this makes a lick of sense.)

But really, for me, it comes down to this: Byrd's last four starts have been pretty lousy. Yes, one start was goodish, in which he gave up 3 runs in 6 1/3 innings, but needed a pretty serious bailout in that seventh inning with the 2-5 double play (K-CS). In his other three starts, you see 5 runs in 4 2/3 inning, 5 runs in 7 1/3 innings, and Saturday, hoping to clinch a playoff berth, 6 runs in 4 1/3 innings.

For me, the clincher comes in checking a different column: where Westbrook is walking two guys a game, Byrd only walks one, so that's good, but not by a lot. Byrd actually manages to strike out FEWER batters than Westbrook, which is a mean feat. But Westbrook has three outings in his past ten in which he's given up a home run: Byrd has SIX. Westbrook has given up a total of 5 home runs in that span, Byrd has given up NINE. If you're not less hittable ... and you're not going to strike people out ... at least make the hits stay in the park.

I could absolutely see matching Byrd up against a team, telling him to give me five innings, and take my chances. His road ERA, for example, is a nice 3.36 (Westbrook's is 4.83). I think he could give you a composed road start. But right now, from the cheap seats, Byrd looks very much like the rabbit you thank for the 15 wins he squeezed out of the regular season to get us to the playoffs, and let him step aside now that he's gassed.

By the way, this has been a fine "odd-year" season for Byrd: he hasn't missed a start, he has two complete games and 186 innings, and has been a reliable rotation member.

### **3) Dept. of Raffies, Charles Dickens Division**

**It was the best of times:** called in to pitch the 8<sup>th</sup> inning of a 4-3 game, Rafael Betancourt struck out two of the three men he retired in a perfect inning of work. On Sunday, called in with runners on second and third, Betancourt got Nick Swisher to strike out swinging, then struck out two of the three hitters he retired in the perfect ninth to record his season save on the season. One of the hitters he struck out was left-handed nemesis Jack Cust, who hit his three thousand fifteenth and three thousand sixteenth home runs against the Tribe in the other two games.

**It was the worst of times:** uh oh.

Rafael Perez hung two sliders Friday night: one was laced for a double, and the other was laced for an opposite-field Cust, turning a comfortable 4-1 lead into a 4-3 pre-Borowski. And on Sunday, the runners on second and third were there because Perez hung *another* slider to Deric Barton, who doubled after Shannon Stewart's single.

Perez still qualifies as one of our two best relief pitchers, and two bad outings portends nothing in particular, but ... those were some mighty bad sliders. Without Perez at top form in the playoffs, this could be one of the shorter runs in Indians history.

#### **4) Hey, we had one of those!**

Andrew Brown, famous for being traded for Milton Bradley and also being traded for Milton Bradley (again), pitched 1 1/3 scoreless, hitless innings against the Indians. One of the trades put him in the Indians' farm system, so some will recall him fondly.

Brown threw seven strikes in 21 pitches and walked three men. Ironically, this makes him only slightly less wild than Bradley.

#### **5) Ex-Favorite Player Dept.**

Cliff Lee pitched very well in his meaningless two innings of work Saturday, giving up one single and striking out a batter without ceding a run.

Tom Mastny pitched quite preposterously in his 1 2/3 innings of work, yielding a two-run double whose runs were charged to Byrd, then yielding a single-double-Cust combo to give up three more runs of his very own. Yes, he struck out two guys. Ask me if I care.

## **6) For completeness' sake**

Jensen Lewis relieved Rafael Perez with two outs and promptly struck out the batter he faced. Lewis has become the de facto pre-setup man out of the 'pen.

Joe Borowski extended his scoreless streak with his 43<sup>rd</sup> save on the season, this one an honest-to-goodness one-run-game save.

Fausto Carmona labored a bit, walking four hitters in 6 IP, but struck out 7 and gave up only 1 run to win Friday night's game.

## **7) Your fastball, it lacks a certain *je ne sais quois***

A tight 1-0 game Friday became a quick 3-0 game in the span of two pitches, each of which was hit a distance best described as 'great googly moogly' by Ryan Garko and Jhonny Peralta. Starter Joe Blanton also gave up doubles to Victor Martinez and Peralta, gave up 10 hits overall, and won the

"Late-Career Rick Reuschel Look-Alike Contest" between the fifth and sixth innings.

## **8) The youthful youth of the young**

Grady Sizemore, clearly worn down by the long season, collected a hit and a walk Friday, a two-run homer Saturday, and four hits and a walk in five trips to the plate Sunday. One of the hits, a liner jerked down the first base line, was Sizemore's 5<sup>th</sup>

triple of the season.

In fact, each of the first three hitters (Sizemore, nine-year-old Asdrubal Cabrera, and Travis Hafner) collected hits in each of the three games. Of the three, only Hafner is not carded when buying beer, although one gets the impression that Hafner has been large enough not to get carded from the time he was 14 or so, and Sizemore gets carded in order to sell his address on the Internet.

## **9) Today's Spit Take**

*Outfield Assist: K Lofton (J Hannahan at Home)*

Kenny Lofton's arm was a noodle when he was *young*. Now that he is 40, it is ... I don't know, a mashed potato? Seaweed? An optical illusion?

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

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Mark Shapiro tried to replace the champagne for the victory celebration with Ripple, but was thwarted by Larry Dolan, who chided Shapiro and told him not to be such a &quot;cheapskate.&quot; Ripple is not carbonated, so this statement is demonstrably false. Fire Eric Wedge.