

If you were to have told Buff that he'd get 6 innings of 1-run ball from Paul Byrd last night, his facial expression would probably have been quite pleasant after the initial myocardial infarction cleared. However, the bullpen gave up 4 more runs, and Buff is reminded of a time, not so long ago ... and I have a hard time imagine him typing today's column with anything resembling a pleasant expression. **FINAL**

Red Sox (9-6)	0	0	0	0
Indians (5-9)	(4	th	3.5 GB CHW)	0

W: Aardsma (1-1) L: Lewis (0-1) S: Okajima (1)



Hey, look, it's 2006!

If the Tribe is going to recycle their performances, can I just recycle my columns from 2006? They were shorter, too. A real time-saver for everyone!

1) Tales of the Unlikely

Confidence did not run high as the Indians trotted sixty-two year old Paul Byrd to the mound to face his elder, Tim Wakefield. (Think about

this for a moment. Paul Byrd was the *younger* starting pitcher.) Byrd had looked positively preposterous in his previous two outings, prompting a call for two distinctly unethical recommendations for his career. Frankly, since the second option was not chosen, it is not totally important to me if the first was followed or not.

Let me say this, though: Paul Byrd pitched terrifically.

Look, there are the granted chinks in the armor. Byrd allowed six hits in his six innings of work. His "unearned" run was the result of two singles, a very fast runner, and a runner-advancing groundout: had Franklin Gutierrez not channeled Jorge Julio on his throw from right, it's entirely possible that speedy Jacoby Ellsbury would simply have gone from first to third on the subsequent single to right by Julio Lugo.

But here's the magic potion for the sometimes-magical Byrd: zero walks.

Byrd has been plagued by "extra" baserunners in his first two starts, something uncharacteristic for Byrd. Last night, he was much more the "Good Paul" of 2006, in which he threw a high percentage of his pitches for strikes, in this case 54 strikes in 78 pitches. He struck out an unusually-high 6 batters, ALL SIX of them SWINGING. Now, granted, on "get-away day" before the Sox face the Yankees, the lineup was littered with the Jed Lowries and Kevin Cashes of the world, but still, six swinging Ks is six swinging Ks, and the whiffers included Manny Ramirez, Kevin Youkilis, and Dustin Pedroia.

Through three innings of work, Byrd had faced the minimum number of hitters, erasing two singles with double plays. He induced what would have been a third double play ... from Manny ... in the 4th, except that there were already two out. And through the first five innings, Byrd had induced 7 ground ball outs to only 2 fly balls, again an unusual situation for Byrd.

Was his sixth inning "sharp?" I'm not sure you could call it that: Covelli Crisp fouled off three pitches before flying out, Pedroia singled, and each of David Ortiz and Manny lofted fly balls to the outfield on the first pitch they saw, Ortiz' requiring a truly excellent defensive play by David Dellucci to be an out. But it was the top of the order, including the scariest AL hitter of my generation, and Byrd said, "Good night now!" with a flourish.

This lowers his ERA on the young season to 6.07 and he still remains steadfastly Paul Byrd. However, for one night against a superior opponent, Byrd was tremendous.

2) In retrospect

Paul Byrd would be too tough and stringy to eat.

3) Why did you give Victor Martinez your number?

Ten men came to the plate for the Cleveland Indians last night, each of whom got at least two plate appearances. Six of them got hits. Only one got more than one hit. That would be Victor Martinez.

Martinez' 3-for-5 night not only featured singles from each side of the plate, not only featured pulling one, hitting one up the middle, and hitting one the other way (suggesting a certain "completeness" to his hitting approach), but it featured the only hit a Cleveland hitter got with a runner in scoring position and drove in the only two runs scored without the benefit of being physically struck with a baseball.

It's possible that Victor Martinez should be considered a pretty good hitter.

4) Ducks on the pond!

The Indians stranded 11 runners on base last night, and this does not include Franklin Gutierrez, who, after singling and stealing second base, was picked off by the crafty

nearly-mobile pickoff move of octogenarian Tim Wakefield. The man looked hyp-mo-tized on the play. Or Asdrubal Cabrera, who was gunned down trying to steal second. Anyway, 11 guys isn't so bad ... no, wait, actually, it's really shitty ... but at least only EIGHT of them were in SCORING POSITION.

Aaah! Aaah! AAAAAAAH!

5) Managerial Head-Scratchers

Okay, so Paul Byrd has sailed through six innings ... he has thrown 78 pitches ... all six of his hits were singles ... he has passed the toughest part of the order ... the only batters to have seen him a third time were just retired in the 6th ... Tribe-killer Kevin Youkilis has struck out and made an out on the first pitch ... the lame-assed portion of the lineup is coming up ... your bullpen has been used heavily in short starts and stressful late-inning situations ... and you replace him with a cold Jorge Julio. Really, independent of the result, this is a strange decision. (Coupled with the result, it's an infuriating one.)

Asdrubal Cabrera is 22 years old and has never faced a knuckleball pitcher. (He did not face Boston in the

regular season in 2007, and Wakefield did not make the post-season roster; Wakefield is the only knuckler I can find in the AL.) He was moved down to 7th in the order, but maybe this is a good night to put the veteran Carroll in the lineup.

(Cabrera struck out twice, stranded three men in scoring position, and left six ducks in his 0-for-4 night.)

6) Special Squander Ball Shout Out!

With runners on 1st and 2nd and one out after Martinez' RBI single, Jhonny Peralta grounded into a 5-4-3 double play to end the threat.

Kudos to Peralta for not striking out last night, including against Hideki Okajima in the 9th after

both Hafner and Martinez whiffed.

7) Questionable strategy

Hey, Travis, maybe looking at strikes one, two, AND three in the bottom of the ninth isn't the best plan! How can you look at ALL THREE STRIKES? Who are you, Casey Blake?

8) A game of inches

Well, this item certainly isn't about Jorge Julio, who missed the strike zone with 8 of

his 9 pitches, the aggregate distance of which would reach from the plate to the dugout.

No, this item is about Rafael Perez diving in an attempt to catch Julio Lugo's sacrifice bunt attempt: the ball skittered off the end of his glove and everyone was safe, meaning that Lowrie's subsequent single scored two runs. Had he caught that ball, it's conceivable that the Red Sox don't score, or at least score only 1, as Perez retied the next three hitters in order, including the last two with swinging Ks.

The pitch to Lowrie was really terrible, though. Just awful.

9) The Voice of Reason

It is early in the season. The record of this team is only 2 games worse than last year's 7-7 start. We have lost three games in the late innings. We drew six walks last night, showing better patience than we had earlier. We are still ahead of the Tigers by a game. The weather has been truly cold: not just April cold, but Actually Freezing cold. Fourteen games is a small sample, not even a *tenth* of the season. We have gotten superior starting performances from each of four different starting pitchers, and that doesn't include the defending Cy Young winner. Our weakest bullpen pitcher is no longer on the active roster. There are signs of a multi-player offense hiding in the duck-choked pond. Jamey Carroll is a

pleasant surprise thus far. David Dellucci and Casey Blake are unlikely to cut themselves shaving.

10) The Rant of Catharsis

But I don't *feel* ANY of that.

How I FEEL is, in the words of a cartoon stork imitating Jimmy Durante, disgustipated. This team infuriates me. I actively dislike this team. I hate that there are sizable gaps in the offense, stacked together such as to produce entire completely hopeless innings. I hate that our team defense sports errors at third,

rangeless puffery in left, and general malaise. The multiple short starts confound me. The bullpen has reverted to Vintage 2006 Form, the nominal Bullpen From Hell that allows me to carry a perfectly valid expectation of blown late leads in with a 100% vindication rate. I hate that Jhonny Peralta can hit the ball with no one on base and strike out pitifully under other circumstances. I hate that Travis Hafner is following the one-step-forward, two-steps-back career advancement plan, combining flashes of return to form with a .259 batting average and 14 Ks in 14 games. I hate that Franklin Gutierrez has read the 2006 Bad Baserunning Manual, executing a brain-dead, inexplicable, absolutely cremincus maneuver to cost us a run. I hate that the Indians have been out-homered 18 to 9. Eighteen to nine! I can't remember Cleveland's last homer. I

can remember their last three blown saves, though.

I am looking for a reason to allow this team to drag me emotionally through low-scoring, uninspired, baserunner squandering, Quality Start squandering, popgun, four-man offense series of games and am coming up wanting. I dread combing websites for additional information. I cringe at the thought of reading chats or message boards. The Detroit Tigers started by losing each of their first seven games, about as pitiful a start as a team whose mascot does not rhyme with "Schmorioles"; can accomplish ... and we lead them by ONE GAME! One! I look to Eric Wedge for leadership and get monotone mumbling and Jorge Julio and Joe Borowski pitching

crucial innings with slim leads. I look to Mark Shapiro for leadership and I get a Philadelphia Phungus Platoon in left, Joe Borowski as closer, and assorted other sub-optimal options. I look for a reason to believe this team is going to improve, it will get hot, it will show me the passion and execution that will allow me to watch the last three innings of a ballgame without worrying about my spleen rupturing or at least the blood vessels in my eyeballs intact, and I come up empty. Why? Why would I believe in these guys? Because they got hot for a couple months last year? Why is that team the Real Indians and not the team that sucked through the summer or wasted all of 2006 in a Grand Exercise in Organizational Futility? Why is that team the AL Central Team To Beat and not the one that conked out down the stretch before watching the bloody White Sox sweep the

hapless NL team in the Series? Why, why, why? Is it the passion and intensity and joie de vive that these guys show day in and day out? Ha! Ha ha, I say!

Look, part of the mission of this column is to capture the roller coaster of emotions a fan experiences on a day-to-day basis. I understand that this is an irrational, overcompensating reaction to a very small set of barely meaningful games. But it is a valid ... nay, *expected* emotional response to some of the most pointless and discouraging baseball I've seen since ...

... 2006.

Huzzah.