

## If The Left One Doesn't Get Ya ...

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}  
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With all of the hullabaloo about the Indians' hitters finally finding their bats and Cliff Lee turning into Sandy Koufax, the underappreciated performance of the back of the revamped bullpen (sans JoeBo) has been just as vital in the Tribe rattling off four in a row. In his latest, Paul talks about the resurgence of Kobayashi and Betancourt, and an encouraging performance from Raffy Perez last night.



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In the aforementioned 8 games, both Kobayashi and Betancourt have pitched extremely well, with Perez scuffling (albeit ridden hard and often by the Atomic Wedgie) ... that is until last night. Going into last night's game, the back end of the bullpen posted these performances in their previous seven games:

Kobayashi - 3 IP, 1 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 0 BB, 1 K  
Perez - 4 IP, 8 H, 3 R, 3 ER, 2 BB, 3 K  
Betancourt - 2 IP, 0 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 1 BB, 3 K

Then last night arrives, with the Indians clinging to a lead against that

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"vaunted" (note the quotes) Yankee lineup with more than three innings to go to close out the game. What happened in the 5th inning and beyond last night may serve as the moment that the back end of the bullpen settled itself as Rafael Perez righted himself in a very large and in charge manner (2 1/3 IP, 0 H, 1 BB, 1 K), getting an improbable 7 outs with a mere 23 pitches (17 of which were strikes) while allowing only one baserunner.

Following the Scarecrow, Senor Slo-Mo emerged to the sound of gavels hammering down and the crowd being commanded to "All Rise ... Betancourt is in Session". How did the Fist of Steel react to facing A-Rod, Matsui, and Posada with a two run lead? He threw 9 pitches (8 for strikes), retired A-Rod on a weak pop-out, whiffed Matsui, and got Posada to lift a fly ball that Sizemore nestled under for the 27th out.

From the time that Perez entered the game in the 5th, just after Matsui's HR brought the game to a 5-4 lead for the Tribe, the Fist of Iron and the Fist of Steel threw all of 32 pitches to record 10 outs, allowing only one baserunner via the walk (who was promptly erased via the DP) against the "feared" (notice, again, I use quotes as it is not my adjective) Yankees lineup.

The dominance from the two of them served as a reminder of how good the Indians' bullpen was last year and how the fact that The Two Rafaels and Kobayashi have settled into their roles this early in the season (almost immediately after the nominal closer went down with "nothing left in the tank") figures to play a huge role in the Indians' defense of the AL Central. As a corollary, the fact that the 7th, 8th, and 9th inning roles have been claimed, the youngsters in the bullpen (namely Lewis and Mastny) can try to find their groove and slot themselves into the 6th inning man, when needed, in low-pressure situations or even allow the organization to audition even younger arms (Stevens, Newsom) for bigger roles on the parent club.

Last night served as a preview of the punches that the Indians' bullpen possesses, with a Left-Right combination that can't be matched by many teams.

If you see them coming, better step aside...