

The B-List: 5/1

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Thursday, May 01 2008 7:00 PM -

Very exciting ballgame last night before a very sparse crowd at The Prog. In the end, it was Asdrubal Cabrera who delivered, ripping a liner into the right center field gap to bring home the winning run in the bottom of the 11th. In today's B-List ... Buff offers up his first contest of the year, and it's a fun one. We'll put together a nice little prize pack for the winner. And as always, we get Buff's humorous and analytical look at last night's win.

FINAL

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Mariners (13-16)

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W: Kobayashi (2-0) L: M. Lowe (1-2)



Can a win be described as "excruciating?"

1) The feel-bad hit of the spring!

Usually, the first contest of the year is the annual Walt Svirsky Commemorative, but this year, I'm trying something different. Let me set up the contest with a little background.

I think I've told the story before, but when I was younger, I had the

serious belief that I could influence the outcome of Cleveland games of all flavors simply by watching them. That is, by watching them live, I could single-handedly cause the Indians, Browns, Cavs, Crusaders, Barons, or Wonder Lizards to lose. Granted, throughout much of my life, this was kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy, as my teams tended to lose more often than they won, and I tended to remember the losses more anyway, but I tell you it was so. (Oddly enough, my "lucky socks" had nowhere near the noticeable reciprocal effect, which did not prevent me from wearing them anyway.)

I happen to believe that for Cleveland fans of my rough generation (born 1964), this is a fairly common experience. I once posted a story of watching a 1995 playoff game in which all Cleveland runs were scored when I was NOT watching and all New York runs scored when I WAS watching, and got several responses to the effect that I was being ridiculous to believe that I was impacting the team because it was clearly THEM who were affecting the team. I doubt this is a purely Cleveland phenomenon, but I rather think Cleveland fans in general have this impression more strongly than most fan bases.

Last night, I wasn't able to follow the game closely, but I did get to watch the last couple of innings. I watched Ryan Garko line into a double play in the 7th, watched a man get on base for Seattle in the 8th (but did not see the last out), watched the Indians perform dreadfully in the 8th

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, then watched the Mariners tie the score in the 9th

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. I watched the top of the 10th

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, which was bad, but left the room for the first part of the bottom of the

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, when we scored to tie. Excited, I watched Blake and Dellucci strike out with the bases loaded. Frightened at this point, I realized I had The Power, so I did not watch the top of the 11

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, which was perfect. I began watching the bottom of the 11

th

(I cannot help myself), watched an out, and left the room. I came back to peek to see runners on second and third. I left again, peeked in, and saw the bases loaded. I watched Franklin Gutierrez strike out on three pitches. I then hid in my garage, and when I came back, the game was over 3-2. I saw Cleveland score exactly zero runs. I saw Seattle score two.

So, for the first contest of the year, send me your most memorable story in which your superstitious behavior clearly was the primary causative factor to influence the outcome of a Cleveland game. This doesn't have to be limited to the Indians, and it doesn't really have to be about a specific game: for example, you might note that every time you listened to the Browns on the radio, they would lose, but if you turned the radio off during a drive, they would score.

2) Let's hear it for the Old Guy!

It would be hard to argue that you wanted more out of a start

than you got from Paul Byrd last night: in 7 2/3 scoreless innings, Byrd threw 66 strikes in 92 pitches to yield four singles and a walk, but never two baserunners in the same inning. Byrd struck out 4, which is almost irrelevant, but since three of the four singles were yielded with two outs, only one runner got as far as second base (Ichiro Suzuki advanced to second on a groundout and was stranded when the next hitter flew out).

Thus far on the season, Byrd has made six starts, and three of them qualify as actually Excellent: 1 solo shot in 7 6-hit 0-walk innings at Minnesota, and 6 6-hit 0-walk 6-K innings against Boston in which he gave up one unearned run are the others. He doesn't get as deep into games as a Good Sabathia or Cliff Lee, but part of Byrd's success is predicated on not making a fourth trip through a given lineup, and I can't argue with how he's been used. (He faced exactly 27 batters last night, yielding to Raffy Perez when Suzuki made his 4th trip to the plate.)

Now, admittedly, the other three starts ranged from "mediocre" (4 runs in 5 2/3 against NY, where all four runs scored on the 3 HRs he gave up) to "wretched" (6 runs on 3 taters in 3 innings against the Angels), which gives Byrd a fairly mundane season line of 3.74 ERA and 5.6 innings per start), but after his first two awful starts, Byrd has really been a very valuable pitcher. (It's ironic that his one non-terrific

outing in those 4 starts represents Byrd's only win on the season, but I think Byrd is too old and "teamy" to get worked up about his individual W-L record at this stage of his career.)

Here's an exercise: if Westbrook is healthy and in the rotation, and with the resurgence of Lee, you'd have to slot Byrd in as the effective 5th starter. Find me a team out there whose 5th starter (as defined by performance, not by role) approaches either a 3.74 ERA or a 1.19 WHIP. Even with Westbrook out, calling "Aaromy Laffowers" our fifth starter, find me another team whose FOUR starter does that. (Note that I am taking liberties to consider Sabathia still in the front of the rotation, wishcasting his last two starts as more indicative of his expected performance this season rather than using his season stats.)

By the way, of the four hits, three were by left-handers. But if Byrd is allowing singles instead of homers, he can still be an effective pitcher.

3) Adventures in Closer Orthodoxy I

In the top of the 8th, Byrd walked the leadoff hitter, and frogs rained from the sky. Maybe it was just fog. Byrd walks so few batters I may have blacked out. Anyway, Willie Bloomquist, a player of no discernable skills but faster than a catcher was called to pinch-run for him.

Byrd then got Wlad Balentien to swing and miss at three consecutive pitches, then got Yuniesky Betancourt to line out for the second out. At this point, with Suzuki due up, Raffy Perez was summoned from the pen.

Now, this was prudent on several levels: Suzuki had two of the Mariners' four hits to that point off Paul Byrd. He is an excellent left-handed

hitter. And Bloomquist was a threat to run, or at least run fast enough on a hit to get an extra base, so holding him (easier for a left-hander to do than Byrd's nine-moving-parts delivery) sounded like a good idea. Besides, this was the magical Fourth Pass through the lineup, and a fresh Perez seemed like a preferable option to a stale Byrd.

Perez couldn't quite put Suzuki way, as he fouled off both the 0-1 and 0-2 pitches, but Bloomquist tried to run on the next pitch (a ball) and was gunned down by Victor Martinez to end the inning.

With a one-run lead in the top of the ninth and Perez exhausted from throwing all of four pitches already, Shiny New Closed Raffy Betancourt was called to face Suzuki (who was

still Not Out), who singled. This proved to be a big deal, in that Suzuki singled on a 2-0 pitch and eventually scored on comical butchery, including a wild pitch and a steal-of-third-get-home-free play.

Now, look, I understand that Shiny Closers come out to start the ninth of a save situation. That is what Shiny Closers do. But would Betancourt really have been that torqued by having to come into the game after Perez had faced Suzuki, who didn't look all that good against him in the 8th? I mean, ultimately, Betancourt didn't do a very good job, and that's on him, but this smacks of such thoughtless roteness that it made me wince.

4) Adventures in Closer Orthodoxy II

Not to be outdone, Seattle manager Mumble Mumble (I totally forget who manages Seattle: it might be John McClaren. It might be Mariner Moose.) took advantage of Richie Sexson's solo shot in the top of the 10th to bring in his closer, J.J. Putz.

Now, there were few relievers (if any) better than Putz last season. I mean, he was inspiring. He struck guys out and gave up few hits and recorded a heap o' saves and generally looked mean and nasty doing so. He was really, really good. But this season he got hurt early and sports a 9.00 ERA because, as Raffy Betancourt can attest, this is not last year. Meanwhile, Brandon Morrow

had just recorded the third out of the ninth inning by throwing 4 pitches, all for strikes, to whiff Jhonny Peralta. Even taking into account that there are dolphins that can strike out Jhonny Peralta, it would seem like Morrow was doing a pretty good job. But no, the Shiny Closer is back on the roster, you have to give him the Shiny Save or his Shiny Ego will shatter into Shiny Pieces.

Anyway, Putz was terrible. I mean, truly bad. After getting Hafner to K, he gave up a hit to Ryan Garko, which thirteen other pitchers over the past two weeks found exceedingly difficult to do, then gave up a single to Franklin Gutierrez, then walked hitless wonder

(0-for-his-last-14 at that point) Asdrubal Cabrera on 5 pitches, then walked Grady Sizemore on 5 pitches to tie the score. Only the amazing skill of Casey Blake to swing at bouncing pitches and the amazing expanded strike zone to David Dellucci allowed Putz to escape without a loss.

I guess there's something to be said for getting Putz back into his role, and it's indisputable that a Seattle team with a lights-out Putz is better than a Seattle team without one, there's also something to be said for using your resources prudently, and perhaps easing a player fresh off the DL back into his role.

5) Adventures in Squander Ball

How bad did Casey Blake look on that strikeout anyway? Here are the ways in which a run scores with the bases loaded and one out (reasonably fast Gutierrez on third):

- a) Get a hit
- b) Walk
- c) Get plunked
- d) Wild pitch
- e) Weak ground out
- f) Ground ball out that requires defensive effort
- g) Fly ball to medium-deep outfield

h) Decent bunt

Here are the ways to NOT score a run:

- a) Pop out
- b) Double play
- c) Well-hit ground ball right at someone
- d) Whiff

I swear, Blake swung at four pitches (he fouled one off), and if two of them were strikes I'm Millard Fillmore. That was literally one of the worst plate appearances I've ever seen.

Dellucci whiffed, too, but the umpire made a call on the 1-1 pitch that can only be explained by invoking Tim Donaghy. (He did swing at the third strike, so let's not go too far in exonerating Mr. Dellucci.)

Here's a fun stat: Blake hit in the 2 slot, and Dellucci in the 3 slot. They combined to strike out SEVEN TIMES. Let's not do that again. (Six other Indians struck out ... ONCE apiece.)

Now, this doesn't even address the situation in the bottom of the 4th, when the Indians had a potential Big Inning

going against Miguel Batista after a pair of doubles scored the only run in the first 8: with Travis Hafner on second, Ryan Garko ended his nine-month hitless streak with a single to center, where Ichiro Suzuki plays. I don't know if you remember Suzuki: if you went back deep into the archives to ... THE NIGHT BEFORE ... you might have noticed Suzuki throwing Casey Blake out at home when he tried to score from second on a single.

Now, let us consider the relative speed of Casey Blake (an athletic player) and Travis Hafner (a block of wood with toes): Blake's speed

divided by Hafner's speed is approximately the distance from Earth to Mars in meters. To say that Travis Hafner is not fast is to miss the point: Travis Hafner can charitably be characterized as "mobile." And he was thrown so very out on the play by Suzuki (I don't know if I mentioned this, but Suzuki, a former RIGHT FIELDER, actually has what is considered a PRETTY GOOD ARM) that the Indians were forced to wear shackles for the next three innings.

(He was out.)

6) Thought Experiment

If you shaved Masa Kobayashi's head and made him remove his eye makeup, would he look more like Really Big Bob Wickman, or Joe Borowski? I'm thinkin' Bob: he only has two walks on the season and an ERA under 2.

7) Blue Moon Special

Travis Hafner pulled the ball!

8) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Asdrubal Cabrera's game-winning hit broke an 0-for-14 stretch and was really a fine piece of hitting. I kind of wish I'd seen it, but I explained why that was impossible.

Jhonny Peralta drew two walks, one of which ended up being the winning run.

Ryan Garko had a pair of hits: as a

streak hitter, this bodes well.

Both Cabrera's and Hafner's RBI were with two outs.

9) No worries, mate

The Mariners, after stealing two bases that led to runs on Tuesday, tried their hand at it again last night.

Previously-maligned Victor Martinez gunned down Willie Bloomquist at second to end the 8th and Raul Ibanez

at second to end the 1st

: his throw on Suzuki's steal of third would arguably have caught him as well, while Adrian Beltre was successful: still, that's a good success rate.

Let me say this about "Blake cost us the game" sentiments:

a) It wasn't really a very good throw. It was certainly to third, and

Blake simply botched the play, but a GOOD throw goes to the infield side of the bag at somewhere around knee level: this was almost in foul ground at Blake's stomach.

b) I have seen fans chalk that up as Suzuki being "obviously dead to rights out," but it looked like it would have been a pretty close play, and you don't know how those will go.

c) Had he simply been safe and not scored, the next batter popped out for out 2, but the batter after that singled, so Betancourt would have blown the save anyway.

Only a small subset of scenarios would have given us the win in regulation there.

10) Department of Sincerity Dept.

I may have sounded like I was mocking the Eric Wedge High Achievers club yesterday, when in fact I only meant to mock Eric Wedge. I mean, I did that a lot last season. And the season before that. The concept of "Eric

Wedge" and "High Achievement" is virtually antithetical to what this column has been over the better part of two-plus years.

However, I should say explicitly that the Indians High Achievers club sounds like a worthwhile and pretty cool thing: it's an easy way to show support for education and the community, and I applaud it. If you're a kid reading this ... well, frankly, I've got to ask what your parents are thinking, but really, you

should join the club. Why not?
Free stuff, and reading is good.
Writers like me get less exposure if fewer people enjoy reading. So hats off to the Indians for taking the time to support the program.

But I still want a shirt.

**11) Completely False Statement
for the Google Search Engine**

Mark Shapiro dresses as the Polish Sausage at Milwaukee home games, then tries to trip the other runners in order to win. With Randall Simon still at large, I find this assertion extremely unlikely. Fire Joel Skinner.