

The B-List: 5/8

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
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Paul Byrd's performance against the ... wait, there goes a homer ... Yankees was not particularly sharp ... wait, there goes another homer ... but Buff can still find things in yesterday's loss ... wait, there goes another homer ... to write about, including some nice offense from improbable sources, an update ... wait, there goes another homer ... on the bullpen, and a categorization of Mike Mussina's new pitching arsenal. The B-List recaps the game ... oops, false alarm ... while wondering if the upcoming 4-game set against Toronto will feature double-digit runs ... by either team ... all together.



FINAL SCORE					
Indians (16-18)	(3	rd	1.5 GB MIN)	0	
Saurons (18-18)	0	0	0	3	

W: Mussina (5-3) L: Byrd (1-3) S: Rivera (9)

Short column today, due to lack of material.

1) Look out above!

Paul Byrd's start wasn't very good: he gave up a total of 5 runs in 6 1/3 innings, and 4 of the 5 runs scored via the longball. He was around the

plate (52 strikes in 81 pitches) and pretty efficient (76 pitches through 6 complete), but giving up three home runs, including one to Johnny Damon and the THIRD in TWO GAMES to Jason Giambi pretty much negate what positive things there were to take from the start.

I'm not sure I can buy the criticism that Byrd should have been pulled a lot earlier, though: thanks to a double play that erased his only baserunner (a single by Hideki Matsui), Byrd faced the minimum through three: another double play kept the 4th inning from getting out of hand, and after the pair of doubles in the 5

th

(Damon's was a blooper), he retired the side in order in the 6

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. Any runs given up after that point were largely superfluous, anyway, as Cleveland shot their collective wad with a three-run 5

th

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This actually marks the third time in seven starts that Byrd has allowed 3 home runs in a game. I mean, there's no positive spin to be had here: that's truly wretched. Bert Blyleven is cooling champagne and planning to attend Byrd's August starts, when Byrd will likely obliterate Blyleven's long-standing record for homers allowed in the season. But look, four runs scored on those three home runs: a few solo shots here and there aren't going to render a starter useless a priori.

More troubling to me is that Byrd couldn't get anyone to miss

the ball. This marks the third start of the season (including his win against New York, another of those 3-homer games) in which Byrd recorded nary a strikeout. He didn't walk anyone, either, and that's good, but ... zero strikeouts? As in none? Even Eddie Harris from "Major League" was capable of pulling out the KY ball for a strikeout now and again.

I mean, if you're looking for signs whether Byrd is going to be effective or not, obviously three homers and zero strikeouts kind of fits the bill (although, as I said, he WON the game last time he did that). On the other hand, as I also said, he faced the minimum through three, which is by definition as effective as a pitcher can be.

Here's a problem, I suppose: in Byrd's three seasons in Cleveland (counting 2008), opponents have slugged .480, .473, and .487 off Byrd. His AVG and OBP this season are actually about 20 points lower than in the previous two ... but the slugging is even HIGHER. He gave up 26 and 27 homers in the previous two seasons ... and TEN already .. before May 10th ! And he's actually striking out a batter a game less than his 2006/7 average ... which was poor in the first place.

When all is said and done, he's the fifth starter, and this is what they do. I'm inclined to shrug it off as the cost of

doing business.

2) Mighty Casey with RISP

Cleveland's three runs were primarily attributable to Casey Blake, who hammered a Mike Mussina offering to the wall for a two-run double, took third on the throw home, and scored on Kelly Shoppach's single to left.

Here's a remarkable statistic on the young season: Blake is hitting 14-for-33 with runners in scoring position. Go check his stats with RISP in previous seasons: this has been a consistent (and consistently POOR) feature of Blake's game, that his hitting with runners in scoring position has always been dreadful. I mean, yes, he's had hits before, but his season stats are always atrocious. Well, 14-for-33 is not atrocious. In fact, it's pretty damned good (.424) and the reason Blake leads the team with 22 RBI.

He is hitting 7-for-67 without runners in scoring position,

helping to explain his .210 average on the season.

I am not sure which statistic surprises me the most:

- a) Casey Blake is hitting .424 with RISP
- b) Casey Blake is hitting .104 without RISP
- c) The Indians have had a runner in scoring position at least 33 times this season

Given our offensive performance, the last seems most incredible.

3) The line between "good strategy" and "rigid orthodoxy";

And this isn't about Eric Wedge!

In his heyday, Mike Mussina had an impressive arsenal:

two fastballs, a knuckle curve, a fine changeup, all sorts of things. His arsenal today is more pedestrian: the Meatball, the Slinking Cur, the Gravy Dripper, and the Hit Batsman. Mike Mussina is 5-3 with a 4.36 ERA, and this is a testament to his pitching acumen, his intellect, his tenacity, and the power of mass hypnosis.

One key for Mussina is to get ahead in the count: forced to throw 2-0 or 3-0 pitches into the heart of the plate, Mussina will get hit with aplomb. However, if he gets ahead, you can be looking for the Slinking Cur and be fooled by a Garbage Scow out of the zone. To this end, Mussina poured an amazing 10 of his first 11 and 15 of 20 overall first pitches to batters in for a strike.

The Indians, a patient team, swung at ONE of them. One. By Casey Blake. Who doubled later in the at-bat.

The Indians take a lot of pitches, particularly the first one of a plate appearance. And hey, generally, I applaud this approach. It is the cornerstone of plate discipline to feel comfortable enough at the plate to take a pitch you don't

think you can hit soundly until there are two strikes. I cringe at guys who make weak outs by swinging at the first pitch.

But guys ... it's Mike Mussina. He's going to throw the first pitch for a strike. And it's probably going to be a Limping Salesman or Weeping Pustule or Arthritic Beluga Whale. Use some context, fer crine out loud.

4) Dee-fense!

The Indians turned three double plays yesterday, including a line shot to short that doubled off Bobby Abreu at first. I don't really have anything interesting to say, except that I like double plays, and one of those came directly before a single and a homer, so arguably saved at least two runs.

5) Youth be served

Franklin Gutierrez hit a pair of singles and scored a run. After ending April on a hot streak, Gutierrez had been 1-for-15 in May before this game, so it's good to see a couple hits there.

Ben Francisco laced a double off Uber Closer Mariano Rivera. In the three games in which he's had more than 1 plate appearance, Francisco has hit safely in each. He should stop attempting to steal bases, but hitting is good.

6) Bullpen update

Masa Kobayashi gave up a homer and struck out a batter and hardly anyone cared.

Jorge Julio struck out a batter, walked another, and got the aforementioned lineout double play to complete a scoreless inning. His ERA on the season is now 3.37, and he can be identified by over 15% of Tribe fans.

Tom Mastny does not exist.

7) Around the Division

The White Sox beat the Twins to drive both teams closer to .500, from which vantage point they can look down on the Indians.

My Favorite Player Justin Verlander is 1-6 after losing to the Red Sox. You're welcome.

Kansas City lost a game in which they got three hits and made two errors. Their pitchers gave up only 6 hits, which was approximately 6 more than their offense can overcome.

8) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro is trying to use hypnosis to convince Travis Hafner that he is younger, is more confident, can still hit, and has grown hair. One look in the mirror would ruin this scheme, and it is false. Fire Derek Shelton.