

## The B-List: 5/28

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That one hurt yesterday. A chance to get Jake integrated back into the mix with a win. A chance to gain another game, and win a series from the division leading White Sox. And a chance to just get this team and this fan base feeling a little better about themselves. Alas, it was not meant to be. In today's B-List, Buff recaps yesterday afternoon's 6-5 loss, gives us his own thoughts on Raffie Betancourt's woes, and makes fun of the footspeed of Victor Martinez and Jim Thome.



### FINAL SCORE

White Sox (29-23)	0	0	0	1
Indians (24-29)	(3	rd	5.5 GB CHW)	2

*W: Floyd (5-3) L: Betancourt (1-3) S: Jenks (14)*

Bobby Jenks has 8 saves in May. 4 have come against the Indians.

### 1) Put away the hair shirt!

Let me start with something a little out of the ordinary (if, in fact, I have established anything ordinary here): you are overreacting to this loss.

This was not a Season Ending Loss. This wasn't a Hope Crushing

Loss, a Soul Destroying Loss, or an Ineptitude Establishing Loss. This was just a Plain Old Loss. I understand that after losing 10 of 12 in a stretch where playing .500 ball would put us at the top of the division (if two of those wins came against the Sox), everything seems black, but I am telling you that this loss does not compare with the losses of a couple weeks ago. We scored runs. We threw some pitches. We had opportunities to win, and we actually took some of them. When all was said and done, Chicago made one more play than we did and won the game.

But here's where I'm coming from here: we looked like a major-league baseball team again. Not a particularly good one, mind you, but we banged out 9 hits, scored 5 runs, stole a couple of bases ... in short, we didn't look like the thoroughly inept, pointless, hopeless morass we looked like earlier in the month.

Look, it wasn't a *good* performance. We scored two runs in the first inning *without hitting the ball out of the infield*. We gave up the big hits to blow a lead, and given the same opportunity, we couldn't capitalize. Our starter couldn't muster a Quality Start, and only one of three relievers was able to pitch without giving up a run. On the other hand, our starter only gave up three runs in five innings in his first game back, and each reliever did throw a scoreless inning, two of them perfect. The game came down to one simple fact:

Chicago has two hitters hitting over .290 in its lineup: given an opportunity late in the game to hit with a runner in scoring position, each delivered an RBI hit.

Cleveland has two hitters hitting over .300 in its lineup: given TWO opportunities late in the game to hit with a runner in scoring position, NEITHER delivered anything whatsoever.

That's it. Simple. We put the Guys We Want in the Situation We Want and got the Result We Didn't Want. And that's baseball. You shake that one off. I'm neither happy nor peppy about it, but ... of all the losses we've had in the past two weeks, that was probably the one that made me feel LEAST like the Indians don't belong in the A.L. Central discussion.

## 2) Welcome back!

Jake Westbrook's first start after a DL stint was in many ways archetypical: his stamina wasn't very good, so he got knocked out after 5 innings and 92 pitches. His command wasn't very good, so he threw only 52 strikes in those 92 pitches. His stuff has returned to the kind of stuff he had before the injury, so he induced grounders at the typical 9:3 GO:FO ratio. He walked a couple guys instead of finishing them off. He struck out three guys, which is actually quite encouraging for Westbrook. He induced a double play, and had another "double play grounder" come with two outs (evaluating the style rather than the result).

Certainly giving up a home run to Jermaine Dye isn't a good result, but it's not like Dye hasn't hit a home run off a Cleveland pitcher before. And he did load the bases with no one out in the 5<sup>th</sup>, including a 5-pitch walk to Orly Cabrera, giving up two runs in the process. On the other

hand, the runs both scored on outs, so it wasn't like he was pounded ... just hit. His start was actually quite terrific, getting through first two innings facing the minimum (thanks to a DP) and it would have been three had Jhonny Peralta woken up in time.

Ultimately, Westbrook looks like a guy just coming back from a layoff. It does look like he's coming back with most of what he had, so he should slot right in without much strain.

### 3) Catalytic Converter

Of all the skills you want from a leadoff hitter, the one that dwarfs all others is the **Get On Base**. Speed is obviously a plus. Bunting, sure. Power can be a handy tool. Base stealing, why not? There are lots of ways to be a leadoff hitter, but there's only one thing that I simply *demand* from the #1 slot:

**Get. On. Base.**

To this end, Grady Sizemore is a pretty good leadoff hitter. His OBP this season is .372: although his batting average is kinda

poor at .255, and his power is down from years past, Sizemore has proven that he's still valuable even when he's not performing at previous levels.

Sizemore did have a hit yesterday, a first-pitch bunt single that makes you slap your head and say, "Man, why doesn't he try that more often?" (The answer is, because once you do it a few times, teams look for it, and it doesn't work as well, plus it opens the field for better results from swinging away.) But he got on base **three** times by drawing a pair of walks as well.

In Sizemore's last 6 games, he's drawn at least one walk in 5 of them, 7 walks in all. At the same time, in those 6 games, he's collected 6 hits, including 3 for extra bases. In addition, he's stolen a base in 4 of the past 5 games, including a straight steal of *third* yesterday. (His season ratio of 13 SB and 2 CS is obviously excellent.)

Sizemore is not the perfect player: he still hits a dismal .204 against left-handers (albeit with a fine .358 OBP), and his arm in center seems to have degraded from "borderline average" to "David Dellucci" this season, but we certainly have bigger worries than "leadoff hitter."

## 4) Great Moments in Completely Overt Post Hoc Second-Guessing

Second-guessing a baseball move is one of the easiest things a fan can do, because there are so many opportunities, and pesky things like Actual Results don't get in the way. When we say, "Instead of this thing that didn't work (because things generally fail in baseball), he should have done this (which probably would have failed, too, but you can pretend it would have worked)," we have the advantage of not watching our "obviously more intelligent counter move" fail.

With this in mind, and with the very obvious caveat that Raffy Betancourt should simply have pitched better than he did, help me understand the philosophy behind replacing Raffy Perez with Betancourt in the 7<sup>th</sup> inning. Perez sawed through a perfect 6<sup>th</sup> before starting the 7<sup>th</sup> with Joe Crede reaching base on an error. Okay, by definition, Perez did his job here: they did not credit Crede with an "infield single," they said, "Crede would have been out if Andy Marte had made a perfectly reasonable play." Then, on a 1-2 count involving a swing and a miss, Mary-Kate Olsen singled on a bloop to left that was hit no harder than a spongecake. So, although there are two men on base, no one out, and a right-hander coming to the plate, we have Perez who:

- a) had thrown 12 of his 14 pitches for strikes
- b) had induced two right-handed hitters to hit ground balls to third base, a worthy result with runners at first and second
- c) had not allowed a well-hit ball

Now, Betancourt came in and induced the same &quot;ground ball to third&quot; to Orly Cabrera. But now he's facing left-hander A.J. Pierzynski before the righties Carlos Quentin and Jermaine Dye. It would seem that, unless you believed that Mary-Kate's &quot;blast&quot; truly exposed a weakness in Perez, you might consider letting him face an overanxious Cabrera (he was 0-for-4 and swung at Betancourt's first pitch) so that HE could face Pierzynski (one of three legitimate hitters in the lineup) instead of Betancourt.

This is flagrant, really just BLATANT after-the-fact unfair analysis ... but it did occur to me, so there.

## **5) This having been said**

Betancourt did a good job in the 8<sup>th</sup>. He did a credible job to Pierzynski, who hit a pretty good pitch pretty well because he's pretty talented. (The slider was elevated a bit, but Pierzynski did a good job slicing the ball the other way.) He made an awful pitch to Quentin, who punished it. So basically, we lost because Betancourt threw one pitch in the middle of the plate instead of ... well, virtually anywhere else would have worked for me.

## 6) Game Log Follies

Victor Martinez drove in a run in the first inning with an &quot;infield single to second.&quot; I really can't even imagine the circumstances under which that happens without involving a trap door, a glue gun, and seven hundred lemurs. That's really just inconceivable.

Jim Thome grounded into the ever-popular 4-5-3 double play, listed as &quot;second to third to

first,&quot; with a man on first to start. It makes it sound like Thome is So Slow that the runner ran around second, was thrown out stretching for third ... and THEN they still had time to get Thome at first. (Of course, this is simply a product of The Shift.)

In the 6<sup>th</sup>, after Martinez doubled, we get, &quot;David Dellucci doubled to deep right, Martinez to third, Martinez scored advancing on the play.&quot; This means that Martinez made it all the way to third ... from second ... on a DOUBLE ... but because they tried to get Dellucci at second, he was able to score. There's slow, there's really slow, and there's Victor Martinez. (And then there's Ryan Garko, but this is neither here nor there.) (Honestly, I have to believe he had to hold halfway to see if the ball was caught.)

## **7) Simple badness**

With one out and a runner on second in the 7<sup>th</sup> inning, Ben Francisco struck out swinging, and Victor Martinez popped out to shortstop.

With one out and runners on second and *third*  
in the 9<sup>th</sup>

inning, Ben Francisco popped out to first on the FIRST PITCH, and Victor Martinez popped out the shortstop on the SECOND PITCH, which was a BALL.

I mean, how much analysis is necessary there?

Note that each sequence followed a successful sacrifice bunt by Jamey Carroll. Who was 2-for-3 with a double.

## **8) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.**

Masa Kobayashi pitched quite well again.

## **9) Blue Moon Dept.**

Andy Marte not only started a second

consecutive game, not only got a hit in his second straight game, but stole second base as well. Huzzah!

He also made his first error of the season. Eh. I'd still like to see more of him.

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

Larry Dolan's lips move when he reads this column. I have no clue whether this is true, although I find it incredibly

doubtful that he has even *heard* of this column. Fire Mark Shapiro.