

## The B-List: 7/10

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The Tribe broke their ten game losing streak in a big way last night, pouncing on the Tampa Bay Rays for five runs in the fifth and seven more in the eighth en route to a 13-2 win. Aaron Laffey looked good last night, and as Buff notes in today's B-List, lost in the wreckage of this season is jsut HOW good Laffey has been. Buff also hits on the Tribe debut of Juan Rincon, and urges the Indians to continue running Andy Marte out there at 3B.



<b>FINAL</b>				
<b>Generic Rays (55-36)</b>		0	2	0
<b>Indians (38-53)</b>	0	0	0	0

*W: Laffey (5-5) L: Sonnanstine (10-4)*

Well, okay then. I'm gonna go out on a limb and predict that not many Cleveland fans bet on the &quot;13-2 CLE&quot; line before the game.

### 1) Two versions of &quot;unhittable&quot;;

Aaron Laffey made one obvious mistake to Jonny Gomes, a hitter who produces almost exclusively on mistakes, and gave up two runs on 4 hits in 6 complete innings. One of the four hits was an 0-1 single to Willy Aybar (as DH! Isn't Tampa supposed to be *good*?) immediately before Gomes' blast, which had roughly the same chance to stay in the park as Rudy Guiliani has of being the next President.

Other than this, of course, Aaron Laffey was virtually unhittable. Aybar's hit to lead off the third was Tampa's first hit, and the other two were an infield single by Carlos Pena and a Blind Squirrel Special by shortstop Biff Zobrist. Otherwise, Laffey generated outs with his trademark ground ball stuff (8 outs), a surprising number of missed bats (4 Ks, 6 swinging strikes), a couple of popups, and a handful of decently-struck balls.

On the other hand, another reason that Laffey was unhittable was that he put three guys on base via the free pass. He needed a double play grounder to get out of the second, walked Carl Crawford on four pitches in the 3<sup>rd</sup>, and walked Aki Iwamura on five pitches to put runners on 1

st

and 2

nd

after Zobrist's single with only one out. Yes, he retired Crawford and B.J. Upton on five pitches (all strikes) to get out of the inning, but putting the 9 and 1 hitters on base for the 2 and 3 hitters is really not a very good strategic maneuver.

Here's the thing: Laffey has given up 82 hits in 86 innings. That's actually quite good for a sinkerball pitcher with no discernable strikeout pitch (40 Ks for a K/9 of 4.18). To put this in perspective, Jake Westbrook had one season from 2003 to 2007 (when he was a bona fide 30-plus appearance pitcher, but the stat holds true for his early career 2000 to 2002, too) in which he gave up fewer than one hit an inning (2004, 208 hits in 215 2/3 innings, ERA 3.38). If you think of Jake Westbrook as a real, solid upper-middle rotation guy, I submit that Aaron Laffey is pitching as well RIGHT NOW at AGE TWENTY-THREE as Jake Westbrook EVER HAS. Laffey's 3.45 ERA is the product of a few recent subpar outings, but some of the early-season success was probably unsustainable. But really, what is the functional difference between the results of Laffey and Westbrook at this point?

His walk rate is too high for my tastes, 27 in 86 innings, or 2.72 per 9. I was about to get all up in Laffey's face about this. Then I looked at Westbrook:

2004: 2.55  
2005: 2.39  
2006: 2.34  
2007: 3.26 (!)

This isn't to say that Laffey doesn't walk too many guys: he does. I guess what I didn't realize off the top of my head is, so does Jake. Damn.

Anyway, Laffey's 1.27 WHIP could be a lot better if he simply walked fewer guys. On the other hand, it could certainly be the case that part of the reason his hit totals are as low as they are is that he moves the ball around so much (he's also hit 8 batters this season, including Adam Dunn twice, which is a poor survival strategy as well as being poor baseball strategy). Still, a few sessions with Cliff Lee or maybe a phone call to C.C. (yes, I'm leavin' the periods in, the Big Man can sue me if he wishes) Sabathia might not be a bad career plan.

Weird thing: after posting an unearthly 3.57 GO:FO ratio last season, his ratio is a pedestrian 1.68 this season. I still consider him fundamentally a groundball pitcher, but ... well, the numbers sure don't back me up on that one.

## 2) Everybody hits!

And hits, and hits, and hits. Jamey Carroll was actually left out of the night's festivities, taking an 0-for-4 collar, but he did reach base on a bad DP turn by Bud Zobrist, drew a walk, and scored twice. Every other Cleveland hitter had a base knock, and only Kelly Shoppach and Andy Marte (who also drew a walk) got as few as a single hit.

Read that again: 6 of the 9 Cleveland hitters got more than one hit.

In addition, they weren't generally very cheap hits: more than half the lineup contributed an extra-base hit, fully 40% of all the hits were for extra bases, 6 different Indians drove in a run, and EVERY CLEVELAND HITTER SCORED. Every one.

Now, certainly, part of this is due to the fact that Andy Sonnanstine threw WAY too many pitches up high in the zone. Watch the highlights: the hanging curve ball to Francisco, the chest-high fastball to Dellucci, the navel-high fastball in to Choo ... Sonnanstine's command was just crap. Of course, he only gave up 9 of the hits and 6 of the runs. The other mitigating factor is that Gary Glover remains, after multiple teams and group therapy and an effort at witness protection, still Gary Glover.

## 3) Ducks on the plate

Cleveland got fifteen hits ... fifteen hits! They drew three walks as well.

They left FIVE men on base.

The number of runners left in scoring position to end an inning: ONE.

Seven of the Indians' thirteen runs ... more than HALF ... were driven home with two outs. ALL FOUR of Ben Francisco's RBI came with two outs.

It's like I was watching the Anti-Indians.

#### **4) Submitting the resume**

What do you want from a relief pitcher?

Do you want a guy who throws strikes? Raffy Perez threw six strikes and zero balls in his first inning of work. He threw 8 strikes and 1 ball in his second inning of work.

Do you want a guy who throws first-pitch strikes? Five of the six men Perez faced saw a strike on the first pitch.

Do you want a guy who can make people swing and miss? Three of the batters Perez faced swung and missed at a pitch, including Iwamura, who did it THREE TIMES. In THREE PITCHES.

Do you want strikeouts? Perez only struck out two of his six hitters, but one in each of his two innings.

Perez has had his ups and downs this season. His relief of Tom Mastny this weekend was truly regrettable. But after a subpar June, five of Perez' last six outings have been hitless, four walkless, and four scoreless. His K rate is still nearly 9-per-9, and if he has regained some of last year's excellent command, he's a real keeper.

He still desperately needs a sandwich, though.

## 5) The fattest lawn sprinkler in the world

What on EARTH was Juan Rincon doing out there? I mean, I know why he was SENT out there: few pitchers not named Rick Bauer can blow a 13-2 lead, that was a perfect situation for Rincon to make his Indians debut. But great Shiva's cuticles, what in the world was he doing out there? Two walks, two strikeouts, one hit, 14 strikes in 26 pitches ... can someone get this man a pair of Ryne Duren's old glasses? Some of the balls were up around scalp-level, too: he wasn't just missing, he was veritably *clueless*.

At least Bob Wickman threw a strike now and then. Gracious.

## **6) Blue Moon Special**

David Dellucci hit a homer!

To center!

## **7) Kind of like power**

The stat sheet will show that Shin-Soo Choo hit his 3<sup>rd</sup> home run of the season, as well as his first triple, for 7 total bases and a SLG of lots-point-lots.

It should be noted that his homer was a hard line drive that would have been a double except for the quirky nature of the height of the right-field wall. I'm still not convinced that Choo has any real semblance of Actual Power. I'll take what I can get, though.

## **8) Signs of life**

Andy Marte stretched his season-long hitting streak to two games. He has hits in 3 of his last 4 games and raised his OPS from .312 to .424, including .790 for the month of July. His OBP is still higher than his SLG for the season, but not for July (.313/.353/.438).

You know what? I'd kind of like to see what this guy has. Certainly more than I'd like to see what Ryan Garko does not. Leave him in the lineup. Let's see if he can play.