

## The B-List: 8/1-8/3

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The Indians dropped two of three this weekend despite outhitting the Twins in each game and playing better overall defense. In the B-List, Buff touches on Paul Byrd's bad timing, Jeremy Sowers' 5-inning magic, and Matt Ginter's tremendous mookitude. He also introduces a new standard of performance for bullpen pitchers Tom Mastny and Juan Rincon, and revels in the Legend of Kelly Shoppach. On to Tampa!



<del>FINAL SCORE</del>				
<b>Indians (47-61)</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Twins (61-48)</b>	0	0	0	0

W: Blackburn (8-6) L: Sowers (1-6) S: Nathan (30)

<del>FINAL SCORE</del>				
<b>Indians (48-61)</b>	0	0	0	3
<b>Twins (61-49)</b>	0	0	1	0

W: Byrd (6-10) L: Slowey (7-8)

<del>FINAL SCORE</del>				
<b>Indians (48-62)</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Twins (62-49)</b>	0	0	1	0

W: Liriano (1-3) L: M. Ginter (1-3)

Of all the games, the one in which the Indians outhit the Twins 7-6 and made one

fewer error was the most exciting.

## 1) Very Bad Timing

In Paul Byrd's last three outings, he has allowed a total of two runs. He followed a shortish 5 1/3 inning outing against the Angels (his 4<sup>th</sup> win of the season) with a pair of outings in which he went at least 7 innings (his 5<sup>th</sup>

and 6<sup>th</sup>

wins of the season. In each game, he allowed zero home runs and posted an aggregate ERA of 0.90. Oddly enough, because Byrd has walked 2, 3, and 2 hitters in those three games, his WHIP of 1.44 is actually higher than his season WHIP of 1.34, but the fact that each game featured a lone extra-base hit, and each extra-base hit was only a double goes a long way toward explaining why Paul Byrd has been so successful lately.

Really, you could go back four starts: even though his 6-inning 3-run outing wasn't as noticeable as any of the last three starts, only one of his 9 hits allowed was for extra bases (a double), and it was the marvelous &quot;work&quot; of his bullpen that lost that game. (In that game he walked only 1 batter.)

So, in context, let's say those four starts had spanned the stretch from mid-June to early July instead of mid-July to early-August. This, coupled with the word-of-mouth note that Byrd's turnaround came after talking to Bert Blyleven about his curveball (really, is there someone else you would rather talk to about your curveball?) would potentially have made Byrd look like a real pitcher, a veteran presence for a team down the stretch, an Actual Commodity rather than Jarrod Washburn. We talked briefly about where I think Byrd fits, and really, I think he still

does for at least a couple of those teams.

(By the way, there was a report that Colorado was interested in acquiring Byrd, but Colorado is on Byrd's list of no-trade exceptions. Is this in any way surprising? A flyball homer-prone pitcher in Colorado? Does anyone remember Eric Milton? All this tells me is that Paul Byrd is smarter than the Colorado Rockies. Hold out for thicker air, Paul.)

I guess if I wanted to point out anything about this actual game, it would be that I was impressed by Byrd's aggressive nature in the third, when he could have largely given away the game: after his first three pitches were bunted for two singles and a sacrifice, Byrd walked Joe Mauer on four pitches. (It does not say "intentional" next to the walk, but let's be serious here. Does anyone think that Paul Byrd was nibbling there, or suddenly lost his command? First base open, Mauer hitting about .620 against Byrd ... yeah, I think Byrd had "intent" there, and wisely so.) But after that, with Justin Morneau at the plate (a very dangerous hitter), and then Jason Kubel (a good righty-masher), Byrd threw nothing but strikes. Rather than jerk around and nibble the corners and try a lot of tomfoolery, Byrd said, "You know what? I'm too old for this crap. Go ahead and hit this, hoss." Morneau did get a sac fly out of the deal, but that was it.

Other than that, I mean, some innings he threw first-pitch strikes, others he didn't. Some guys fouled pitches off, some missed. Although Byrd has walked more than two guys a game on average in his late-season Path To Success, I get the impression that Byrd is throwing the ball pretty much where he wants it to go, trying to induce guys to hit his pitches, and accepting a couple walks as part of the bargain. (I still say he gets traded this month.)

## 2) The Five-Inning Wonder

For the second straight start, Jeremy Sowers retired the first fifteen batters in order. This time, after allowing a leadoff double to Brendan Harris, Sowers was able to escape a lot of damage by getting a sacrifice (Adam Everett's sole offensive weapon), getting Carlos Gomez caught stealing after his RBI single, and striking out Denard Span.

Also unlike his last start, he didn't make a strong comeback with two more innings, rather getting hammered to the tune of two singles, a homer, and a double before being relieved by Jensen Lewis.

Look, nothing is more encouraging than a goodly number of consecutive perfect innings. They weren't Paul Byrd &quot;Thousand Feet of Outs&quot; perfect innings, either: Sowers got 9 ground outs to 6 fly outs and struck out 4 without walking any. A couple of the innings looked a smooth as anything Cliff Lee has posted this season. With the repeated caveat that I don't have a scout's eye and look at actual pitchers' &quot;stuff&quot; with the layman's eye I possess, Sowers looks to be throwing consistently harder (I mean, maybe 3 mph or so, but consistently and moderately deep into games) and is locating better. I am still not impressed by the separation of his fastball and straight change, and don't see a lot of evidence of a Lee-style &quot;cutter&quot; in the repertoire. But Sowers clearly looks like a better pitcher in his past two starts than he did when posting three-inning starts earlier in the year (or walking seven guys in four innings).

I guess this is what it comes down to: although I'm not necessarily CONVINCED that Jeremy Sowers has what it takes to be a successful major-league starter (he reminds me too much of Nate Robertson), I'm certainly more willing to entertain the notion that he is. Moreover, I'm convinced that his ceiling is no longer &quot;innings muncher:&quot;; although I think the LIKELIHOOD is low, there is at least a CHANCE that Sowers COULD become Actually Good. There's the potential for Good there. I bring this up because ...

### 3) Mook Report

... this is not true of Matt Ginter.

I want to be clear here: I'm not saying that Matt Ginter is a doofus, a fraud, a talentless goober ... I'm just saying that Matt Ginter's ceiling is &quot;mook.&quot; If everything goes exactly right, Ginter can have the kind of 5 shutout inning start that he had in his opener, but generally speaking, Ginter has the margin of error of a balloon-shaver. He throws his stuff, it'll get hit a bit: he gets the ball up or spins instead of snaps and \*boom\*, runs on the board.

And so, you could look at Ginter's stats and Sowers' stats and say, &quot;Eh, roughly comparable.&quot; But the thing is that Sowers has upside, and Ginter has none. So forget what I said about Ginter being eligible for the Byrd Role next season. He's not. He's a mook.

Let me take this opportunity to say that you might think of Byrd in the

same light as Ginter, a guy with no upside, a serious (but truly overpaid) mook. I think this is missing some of the subtlety of pitching here: Byrd doesn't have upside in the conventional sense that he might throw a no-hitter or might develop a killer unhittable pitch or even control the strike zone like Lee. He more has upside in the guise of being able to shut down an opponent multiple times and string together some of these outings, especially against an aggressive team. I guess what I mean is, you look at Byrd giving Blyleven a run for his taterosity money and think, "Gah, he has nothing," and you might overlook the fact that, when pitching well, Paul Byrd can actually be a real asset.

(Implied in this harangue is that Matt Ginter can't.)

#### **4) The malaise of the jejune**

I'm just not going to get all worked up about the offensive brownout this weekend: it's not like the Twins were really clubbing the ball, or performed that many more tricky Feats of Smallball or we were overly squanderlicious. We just weren't very good, and Minnesota has some very good pitchers. I mean, Ben Francisco stranded four guys in scoring position in consecutive plate appearances against Frank Liriano Sunday, but you know why? Because Frank Liriano is freaking tremendous, that's why. He struck him out on the nasty back-foot-slider that we all love Raffy Perez for throwing, and then caught him looking for that pitch and throwing substantial 93-mph heat on the outside corner instead. Liriano is really good, and we tip our collective hats. (Since I would rather see Minnesota win the division than Chicago, I applaud the Twins' decision to bring up Liriano and DFW Livan Hernandez, although the late late late late timing of the move qualifies as a GM Head-Scratcher.)

Similarly, Nick Blackburn isn't as sexy or well-known as Liriano, but he's got a 3.56 ERA on the season and posts a mean-spirited 1.26 WHIP. He's only struck out 70 guys, but has walked a stingy 20 on the season. His 6-hit 1-run affair wasn't the best game I'm seen this season, but the guy is a credible mid-rotation starter, maybe a 3 guy. We didn't hit him well and so what?

Really, we won one game because Kevin Slowey (who arguably had the best overall command of his stuff, with 7 Ks and 0 BBs) threw two terrible pitches that were blasted out of the yard.

## 5) The Legend of Kelly Shoppach

Consider a player who hits .276/.341/.533. You might wish that he had a little better plate discipline, having drawn only 15 walks on the season (and a couple of those intentional), and really, 72 whiffs in 210 AB is kind of a lot of whiffs. In the last month, when the player was very, very hot, he hit .318/.384/.682 (six eighty two!) and still struck out 22 times in 66 AB. So this 1-in-3 ratio is pretty solid: he's going to do that under the best of circumstances.

But did I mention he slugs .533 ... slugged .580 in June when he started getting everyday playing time on the 11<sup>th</sup> of the month (he had played the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, too) ... then slugged .682 (six eighty two!) in July? (He is currently slugging a paltry .667 in August ... but that's three games.)

What you see is pretty much what you get with Kelly Shoppach: he is going to swing, and that swing is going to be pretty hard. Shoppach is a subscriber to the Dustin Pedroia / Dan Uggla School of Swing Mechanics, which is, &quot;Swing Real Hard.&quot; But I'll say this: it seems to be working for all three men. (I don't know if Shoppach can be converted to second base: his build does not remind me of Pedroia's, Uggla's, or Craig Biggio's.)

Anyway, Shoppach got a hit in all three games, including a pair of extra-base knocks: a double Friday and a two-run homer off Slowey on Saturday. He struck out three times in 12 plate appearances and drew a walk. The funny thing is that at the beginning of the season, I would have had no problem saying that the Ks and BB were &quot;par for the course,&quot; but for Shoppach this season, so are the hits and total bases.

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

Jhonny Peralta was the only player other than Shoppach to have a hit in each of the three games.

Ben Francisco and David Dellucci hit home runs.

Andy Gonzalez went 1-for-3 to maintain his .333 batting average.

## 7) Bullpen Roundup

Raffy Perez solidified my conception of him as a good relief pitcher with potentially excellent stretches by sawing through 2 perfect innings in relief of Byrd in only 20 pitches (14 strikes), including one swinging K.

Tom Mastny threw a perfect inning. My expectations for Mastny are so low at this point that I consider it a job well done if he is wearing pants.

Jensen Lewis had a superficially-good outing in relief of Sowers, getting out of a runner-in-scoring-position jam by hitting a batter (Adam Everett's other offensive skill) and getting a popup, then pitching a perfect 8<sup>th</sup>. Two of the outs in the 8<sup>th</sup> were lineouts, though, so it's not like Lewis was dominant or anything.

Juan Rincon gave up only ONE home run. Again, low

expectations, pants in evidence, mission accomplished.

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

Eric Wedge loses tic-tac-toe games against chickens at local carnivals. This is quite false, although the potential proof for the theoretical libel suit would be amusing. Do not play David Dellucci.