

The B-List: 8/8 - 8/10

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If only the Indians could play the Blue Jays more often, it would be a playoff berth for sure. The Tribe pitching completely throttled the Toronto offense, littered with ex-Tribesmen, and in the B-List, Buff addresses a nice debut from Anthony Reyes, wonders why it took so long for Paul Byrd to adjust, and notes extreme offensive performances by Shin-Soo Choo on one end and Kelly Shoppach on the other. **FINAL SCORE**

Indians (50-64)	0	0	0	3
Blue Jays (59-57)	0	0	0	1

W: A. Reyes (1-0) L: Purcey (1-3) S: J. Lewis (1)

FINAL SCORE

Indians (51-64)	0	0	0	1
Blue Jays (59-58)	1	1	0	0

W: Byrd (7-10) L: Halladay (13-9)

FINAL SCORE

Indians (52-64)	2	0	1	0
Blue Jays (59-59)	0	0	0	0

W: Lee (16-2) L: Richmond (0-2)

I'm sorry, the stats say that Toronto has scored 500 runs this season, but I can't imagine for the life of me how this can be true.

1) Welcome aboard!

Anthony Reyes joined the big club for the first time since being acquired from St. Louis just in time to send Matt Ginter to the 15-day Disabled Mook List and make Friday's start. In one sense, starting against Toronto is a nice way to start: this is a team for which Joltin' Joe Inglett leads off, the post-value incarnation of Brad Wilkerson bats second, Vernon Wells is still hurt, and later in the game, the team pinch-hit for Johnny "Weak Stick" McDonald with ... Gregg Zaun. Before everyone gets carried away about how Inglett is having a fine year (ending the weekend with a nice .295 batting average), let's just say I took dramatic

license and agree to disagree as to whether Joe Inglett is truly a good hitter.

It would be interesting to compare the 2008 debuts of Reyes and Ginter, in that both were successful without at any point actually looking unhittable. This simply may be Reyes' repertoire. I am guilty of American League Bias when it comes to fandom, so I remember Reyes in his last incarnation as the guy who held his own pitching the opening game of the World Series in 2006 rather than think of him as Anthony Young Jr. in going 2-14 with a 6-plus ERA last season. I mean, look, that's terrible. What am I going to do, spin the stats to make him look good? Not gonna happen. He was bad.

I guess here's the thing, though: Reyes is 26 and clashed terribly with Super Duper Pitching Coach Extraordinaire Dave Duncan. Now, Duncan's record is largely unassailable: he has gotten some remarkable results with some thoroughly unremarkable pitchers. (Jeff Weaver comes to mind.) If you're a washed-up vet or a reliever coming off an injury, you want to go to St. Louis. Young pitcher, eh, not so much. I get the impression that Duncan is a guy who can help you very much if you have a certain skill set and approach, and if you are missing one of those elements, well, let's just say that he isn't going to be the one who changes in that relationship.

So hey, I don't harbor any overt expectations for Anthony Reyes beyond the fact that he is capable of getting major league hitters out (if inconsistently), he is 26, and, like Sowers for example, has an actual potential to exceed mookdom. To this end, I liked what I saw: 62 of 88 pitches were in the strike zone, he struck out 4 to 1 walk, and gave up one run on 7 hits, all singles.

The singles are a particularly encouraging sign for me in that Reyes can be somewhat taterific: in 85 innings in 2006, he gave up a mammoth 17 homers; last season he cut that back to 16 in 107 innings ... which is merely awful. Hitters slugged .511 off Reyes in 2006 and .464 in 2007, in the NATIONAL LEAGUE, so this is pretty scary stuff. (To the best of my knowledge, St. Louis' park, whose name escapes me except it's not Busch, plays as a slight pitcher's park.) Now,

there was a blurb a writeup that suggested that Reyes sacrificed a few MPH off his fastball for better command: 62 strikes in 88 pitches suggests that this isn't a bad tradeoff ...AS LONG AS the hittable pitches aren't travelling 400 feet. I'd love to see what Reyes is capable of when he's comfortable, but for now, hey, he's younger than Matt Ginter.

2) Of all the Paul Byrds in the world, you're the Paul Byrdiest

You know, let's try this thought experiment: if you throw a knuckleball and are having some trouble ... you know, maybe maintaining a feel for it, or having trouble getting a consistent speed on it ... you might consider calling up Phil Niekro. I mean, there's no guarantee he'd help you, but you could at least give him a call. Maybe even Tim Wakefield. But hey, if you're struggling, you really ought to try, right?

So, let's say you're an aging hack with a bad show-me curveball who can't get lefties out. Wouldn't it behoove you to ask a guy with a good curveball for a pointer or two? Maybe a guy who threw a really, really good curveball? A guy like, say, Bert Blyleven? At, say, THE BEGINNING OF THE GODDAM SEASON?

I'm just thinkin' out loud here.

In all comic seriousness, Paul Byrd has been just spectacular lately, in the period attributed to the time after which he talked to Blyleven about his curve. And here's a pity quote from the AP writeup:

"I had a really good curveball today," Byrd said. "I used it to left-handers a lot. ... Having an extra pitch like a curveball just opens up a whole new area for me ... and it's really helped me against lefties."

I've stripped some meaning from this (Byrd is always a good interview) because I want to focus on the very thing I've harped on: Byrd's splits against lefties have been just preposterous over the past couple of years. And now he has a pitch that he feels comfortable using to **address this specific weakness in his game**.

Radical.

As for the actual performance, well, look, it was really good. Byrd spun a complete game six-hitter, walking no one and striking out two. He needed only 94 pitches to complete the game. It was a little disturbing to see three extra-base hits, and it bears mentioning that the wonderful new weapon he has against left-handers didn't really seem to help all that much: all six hits were given up to left-handed hitters. Still, a complete game is a complete game, and Byrd made himself that much more attractive to a playoff team with an injured starter.

3) Ho Hum Dept.

Cliff Lee.

4) Next!

Jensen Lewis earned his first save of the season Friday in relief of Reyes (and Raffy Perez, I suppose). Lewis actually closed one season at Vanderbilt, although it was his freshman season and I don't know what happened after that. Still, Lewis is not so much chosen for his pedigree as for his Not Eddie Mujicaness and his Not Raffy Betancourtiness and his Not Masa Kobayashiness. I mean, he's next. (We won't mention his Not Tom Mastnitude as this is self-evident.)

Lewis has a number of things going for him: he can speak walrus, he is an

amateur astronomer, he metabolizes chlorine ... it's really impossible for me to think that any one facet of a Lewis performance is more important than any other facet. He did get through a hitless ninth, but he walked the leadoff hitter. Who was Gregg Zaun. After getting two strikes. And Zaun stinks. He induced a pair of potential double-play grounders, but neither was a double play. He struck out Alex Rios looking, but Alex Rios represented 3 of Toronto's 7 strikeouts.

I am all for giving Lewis a shot at closing. Why the hell not? But, as with Kinky Friedman's gubernatorial campaign (whose slogan was, in fact, "Why the hell not?"), as much as I dislike the incumbent, my expectations of a Glorious New Era are pretty damned low.

5) Speaking of Raffy Perez

After proving mortal in the bottom of the 8th on Friday, Perez returned to the hill Sunday in relief of Cliff Lee. As Lee had spun 8 shutout innings and Cleveland had managed to scrape up 4 runs, this was not a save situation. Perez did not seem to let that bother him:

Adam Lind: Strike (looking), Strike (foul), Strike (swinging)□

Rod Barajas: Ball, Ball, Strike (looking), Strike (looking), Strike (swinging)□

Lyle Overbay: Strike (looking), Strike (looking), Strike (swinging)

It was like, "Nope, can't hit that ... nope, can't hit that ... well, I can't hit it, but there are two strikes, so I have to do something ... nope, I was right, couldn't hit that."

6) By the way

Addressing Jensen Lewis and Raffy Perez covers the Cleveland relief pitching in the three-game set in its entirety.

7) Great googly moogly

When Kelly Shoppach struck out swinging in the top of the 6th on Friday, it began a streak of contactless ineptitude for the ages: K, BB, K, K, K, flyout, BB, K, K, K, groundout, K.

Shoppach did the ol' Bo Jackson break-the-bat-over-the-knee after one of the Ks, which is all well and good, but much like crushing aluminum cans vs. the old steel variety, today's pencil-handled bats no longer provide the same sense of wonder and awe.

But it was a bad string.

8) "Doubles Power"

Sometimes when a player in the minors isn't hitting a lot of home runs or there are questions about his slugging, an analyst will reassure fans that the guy has "doubles power," meaning that he is quite capable of hitting the ball hard into the outfield gaps or even over outfielders' heads, so although you shouldn't expect a lot of homers from the guy, you can still get a productive ballplayer. Consider a guy like Derek Jeter, who normally hits around 20 home runs but also 35 doubles or so to boost him into a decent slugging percentage.

Now, I don't know a heckuva lot about how Tommy John surgery (UCL replacement) affects a hitter, but I do know that at age 26, I would like to have seen more power from Shin-Soo Choo at this point. I understand that power is normally the last skill to develop for a hitter, and often peaks in the late 20s, but ... well, I'd like my corner outfielders to have more power. Choo has a keen eye and posts good OBP numbers (.353 this year; .373 in limited exposure in 2006), but his power has always been somewhat of a nascent skill. Still, although he has 4 home runs in 178 AB (which is lousy, virtually middle infielder territory), he does have 22 extra-base hits on the season thanks to 17 doubles and a triple.

Some of this was in evidence this weekend: Choo had an excellent series, going 3-for-4 with a double and two (two-out) RBI, 1-for-5 against Roy Halladay et al, and 3-for-4 Sunday with all three hits doubles. I remain skeptical that Choo will develop

either enough power or an ability to look less ridiculous against left-handed pitching to be an everyday corner outfielder, but at least I understand why he's on the roster.

9) Moderate redemption

It should be noted that after being benched for a couple games after letting his frustration get the better of him, Ryan Garko rebounded with a pair of 2-for-4 outings, including a double off Roy Halladay, 2 RBI Saturday, and a two-out RBI Sunday. Garko's an easier guy to root for than to watch play: it's hard to take two games and present them as conclusive evidence of anything, but here's hoping in fanboy fashion that Garko ends the stretch run on a high note.

10) Journalistic integrity

David Dellucci had two fine ballgames, hitting 3-for-4 with a two-out RBI Saturday and 1-for-2 with an RBI double and a run scored Sunday. I remain committed to his removal from the roster, but applaud his effort and performance this weekend.

11) Encouragement from the bottom of the order

Andy Marte went 0-for-3 against a pitcher who LOWERED his ERA to 7.40, but he did draw a walk and didn't whiff.

However, he went 1-for-4 with an RBI and a run Saturday, and 2-for-4 on Sunday. Asdrubal Cabrera joined him with 1-for-3 with a walk Saturday and 2-for-3 Sunday efforts.

Look, these guys are lousy hitters in 2008. Might as well trumpet when they both contribute in the same game. I have higher hopes for Cabrera, but hey, at least they're playing: good for Wedge.

12) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Eric Wedge plans to install himself as closer if Jensen Lewis falters. Actually, I'm not sure this would have a practical effect on the season, but it's untrue nonetheless. Do not play David Dellucci.