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In some ways, it's hard to believe that the Orioles are close to .500 in the AL East, at least based on last night's game. In the B-List, Buff assails both their pitching and their team defense, which was comical. He also apologizes for Eddie Moo, appreciates Eric Wedge, and says mean things about Peter Angelos. Which isn't entirely relevant, but is more fun than watching Ben Francisco play right field.



FINAL SCORE				
Orioles (56-61)	0	0	2	1
Indians (53-64)	4	1	0	0

"W": Mujica (1-1) L: Cherry (0-1)

I'm glad we won, and there were plenty of things done well, but that was one of the most comically badly-played games in recent memory.

1) Rays of hope, rains of frogs

Consider this pitcher: in two innings, he faced six batters, starting five of them with a first-pitch strike. Two of the hitters grounded out on the second pitch, two others flew out on the second pitch, and the other two hitters struck out swinging. Yes, the players who struck out fouled off a total of five pitches, but that's really a very

efficient start to the game: control of the strike zone (5 balls in 21 pitches, good movement, and strikeout stuff.

Now, over the next three innings, this same pitcher walked the leadoff hitter in two of the three innings on four pitches. One of the walks was erased on a double play, but the other scored the Orioles' first run after a single, fielder's choice, and groundout. He gave up two extra-base hits, and both pitches were up in the zone: the double to Nick Markakis was simply grooved in the middle of the plate, and the homer by Aubrey Huff came on a belt-high pitch on the inside corner that is basically The Pitch Aubrey Huff Turns On. Still, all five hitters in the 4<sup>th</sup> saw a first-pitch strike, and the pitcher faced the minimum in the 5<sup>th</sup>

and 6<sup>th</sup>

thanks to the double play.

The pitcher then proceeded to lose most of his command in his 7<sup>th</sup> inning: after a first-pitch groundout, he walked Ramon Hernandez on four pitches

*for the second time*

. I don't think this is any innate fear of Ramon Hernandez, just a serious lapse of goodness. The next hitter fouled off a pair of two-strike pitches, but ultimately walked as well, and two singles later, the pitcher's night was done and the bases were loaded.

So, what to make of Fausto Carmona at this point? Well, it's pretty clear that his overall command is still not 100% back: four walks in 6-plus innings still sucks. Walking the leadoff hitter in an inning smacks of a lack of comfort on the mound: perhaps not being able to coordinate the parts of the windup or the grip

or something. Maybe it's a wandering mind. I tend to lead to mechanics at this point: Carmona has been off all year and not that far removed from a DL stint.

This isn't to say his command is completely gone, though: he did throw 65 strikes in 96 pitches, and before the 7<sup>th</sup> it was 55 strikes in 77 pitches. I mean, 55:22 is Vintage Paul Byrd territory. The four strikeouts are encouraging, and Carmona posted his customary 10:5 GO:FO ratio. Of the six hits Carmona allowed, 4 were singles, and the two extra-base hits above were largely the result of missing badly. That means, at least before the 7

th

, not much separated Carmona from a great start. The 7

th

, of course, was wretched, retiring one of the five batters he faced, so there's still work to do, but despite the ending numbers that say Carmona gave up 7 runs in 6 1/3 innings and must have been terrible, I'm more encouraged by this start than I was the last one.

## 2) The standard apology, mitigated

Eddie Mujica garnered his first win of the season by pitching badly enough to force the Indians to come from

behind.

First, the apology: I am sorry I noted that Eddie Mujica was pitching well. I am sorry for advocating an increased role. This is entirely my fault. Mea bloody culpa. I will never learn. If I tout a lesser-known relief pitcher, he will turn into a newt. This has been established, and I apologize.

This having been said, the bases-clearing triple that Mujica yielded to Markakis was ... well ... actually a pretty good pitch. It had downward movement and was diving from thigh-high to shin-level. It was on the black of the inside corner. Mujica had induced a swinging miss on his first pitch and had good movement. There might be a question as to whether you should be throwing an inside pitch to Nick Markakis, who has 34 doubles on the season and is much more likely to jerk one down the line than followup hitter Mel Mora, but I have to say, Eddie Moo bias noted, that that looked much more like a good job of hitting by Markakis than a bad job of pitching by Mujica.

Now, here's the thing: if you are going to throw that pitch, the first baseman should be closer to the line. A single in the vacated hole is one or two runs: a shot down the line is two or three. So the fact that Ryan Garko WASN'T particularly near the line suggests:

- a) Garko didn't get the signal to reposition
- b) Eddie Moo wasn't supposed to throw inside and missed egregiously
- c) both

I can't really tell from the replay where Fasano wants the ball.

### **3) More confident conclusion**

I can tell you this, though: Ben Francisco could hardly have played that ball worse than he did. Had he drop-kicked the ball into the stands, he would have looked no less athletic or less cognizant of the principles of angles and spin. I thought I was watching a scene

from &quot;It Happens Every Spring.&quot; Horrid.

#### 4) Hilarity at the Ballpark

Asdrubal Cabrera had a fine day at the plate, superficially hitting two extra-base hits. Granted, his home run looked like a pop fly off the bat and landed in the halfth-row (just in front of the first row), but it went over the fence and that's terrific. But his double ... when you see &quot;doubled to shortstop&quot; in the game log, you know something weird has happened. Vince Coleman didn't hit doubles to *shortstop*. No, instead, Cabrera smashed a ball to Mel Mora's left, and Mora, playing third base, used footwork reminiscent of Frankenstein's monster, then pulled out his Corey Smiff Commemorative frying pan and whacked the ball into short left-center field, where the Orioles' fielders meandered to it eventually. In fact, this was potentially an inning-ending double play turned into a go-ahead double.

The Orioles as a whole used special strategy on double play balls: in the first, after ersatz starter Dennis Sarfate

let th first four hitters reach base, Shin-Soo Choo hit a ground ball to shortstop Alex Cintron, who threw to Brian Roberts covering ... nothing ... and then Roberts whirled to throw to first to get ... no one out. (Eventually, Andy Marte felt sorry for the O's and grounded into an inning-ending double play.)

In the 7<sup>th</sup>, clinging to a tenuous 8-7 lead, the Orioles allowed the first two hitters to reach base, putting runners at the corners. Pinch-hitter Kelly Shoppach then grounded the ball to Mora, and Choo was running on contact. Mora fired home ... but too quickly for Choo to have made a full commitment to running home, and Choo scrambled back to third base. No outs were recorded on the play. (Choo then scored on a sac fly, and pinch-runner Andy Gonzalez scored on Cabrera's ersatz double.)

## **5) A rally for the ages**

Sarfate made Carmona look like Pinpoint McGee in

his stint: a brisk 49:43 strike-to-ball ratio and 5 walks allowed in four-plus innings. After walking the first two hitters in the 5<sup>th</sup> (on ten pitches total), Sarfate was mercifully pulled in favor of lefty Alberto Castillo. Facing Shin-Soo Choo, who cannot hit lefties in any way, shape, or form, Castillo promptly hit Choo with his first pitch to load the bases.

Ryan Garko drove a single into left for an actual RBI, but Jhonny Peralta was held at third to leave the bases loaded. Sal Fasano strode to the plate, swung and missed at a 2-1 pitch, and was struck by the 2-2 offering for his second RBI of the game.

In other words, the Indians scored two runs on one hit, two walks, and two HBP.



## **6) A killed rally for the ages**

With the bases loaded and no outs, Andy Marte promptly struck out on three pitches and Asdrubal Cabrera popped out on a 2-0 pitch. Grady Sizemore made the third out, but it wasn't nearly as infuriating because he needed a hit to score a run: Marte and Cabrera didn't.

## **7) Bombs away!**

In addition to Cabrera's "shot" in the second, Ben Francisco hit a moon shot off Jamie Walker in the 8<sup>th</sup> for a solo shot and Andy Gonzalez hit his first homer of the season off Walker with a man on base. The combined line of the Indians' first basemen (Gonzalez ran for Garko in the 7<sup>th</sup>):

3-for-4 with two runs scored and 4 RBI.

David Dellucci hit his first triple of the season; Jhonny Peralta hit his 34<sup>th</sup> double.

## **8) Managerial Back-Patters**

On the surface, the decision to pinch-hit Kelly Shoppach for Sal Fasano in the 7<sup>th</sup> seems like sound and fury signifying nothing: Fasano is hitting an extremely unlikely .323 on the season, but despite the small sample at least holds his own at the plate. I could envision a ground ball that doubles up Fasano that doesn't

double up Shoppach, but look, both men are pretty slow. And Shoppach was coming off a truly horrifying stretch of whiffing, 8 in his past 12 plate appearances including both a Golden Sombrero and a Tinfoil Hat in consecutive games.

Which is, actually, why I liked the move: it sent a message to Shoppach that look, you are our best-hitting catcher, you have the skill I want, you are the man (restricting my choices to catchers on the roster) I want at the plate in a close game when we need runs. Remember, I'm a big fan of evaluating decisions BEFORE the

result, especially for something as mercurial as baseball: this move may or may not have worked, but I liked it very much.

(As it turned out, Shoppach hit the grounder to third that Choo got back on and eventually scored; later in the game, he laced a single to left.)

By the way, I also liked that Jen Lewis was called on the pitch the ninth: it wasn't a save situation, but getting the last three outs is still part of the job description, and he should do it if he's

going to be asked to play the role.

## **9) Welcome to the club!**

Brandon Donnelly made his first appearance for the Indians, just under a year after undergoing UCL replacement surgery ("Tommy John"). He was ... well, he was a blunderbuss. He threw 10 strikes in 20 pitches, gave up a single, and walked a guy in one scoreless inning. The scoreless part was good, and he did strike out the remnants of Kevin Millar, but ... I dunno. We got more

out of him that Keith Foulke or Cliff Pollitte, I guess.

## **10) Slightly off-topic**

I come from a family of Orioles fans, who have largely abandoned them for the Nationals now that Washington has a team again. I don't HATE Peter Angelos, but I resent him: his long history of meddling, micromanaging, deal-vetoing, contentious posturing, Nationals-TV-rights-screwing has made the once-proud Baltimore franchise a laughingstock, arguably

one of the three worst-run franchises since the late nineties.

However, the (possibly urban legendy) story goes that the one player that Angelos absolutely refused to consider dealing under any circumstances was a fellow man of Greek descent, Nick Markakis. Now, I find the thought that Greek heritage played SOME role in this decision to be perfectly plausible, but I rather doubt that was the whole reason behind the move.

In any event, watching Markakis smash extra-base hits off three different pitchers (doubles off Carmona and Lewis, triple off Mujica) to raise his numbers to .301/.400/.494 (17 HR, 71 RBI, 72:84 BB:K ratio), I have to say, that's looking like one heckuva decision. That boy can play.

## 11) Idle Musing

With a home run that raises his ridiculously small-sample numbers to .250/.429/.438, is it possible that Andy Gonzalez could actually play? Not as



starter, but as utility infielder? Not necessarily to replace Jamey Carroll per se, but at least make it such that if someone wanted to swing a waiver-wire deal for Carroll, you could consider letting him go?

Note: Gonzalez is historically an execrable infielder : .864 fielding percentage as a 3B, .946 as a 1B (.933 for Cleveland this season). However, he actually played every position except catcher and pitcher for the ChiSox last season.

Eh, anything is *possible*, I guess. Carroll's more the guy you want out there for a multi-week stretch in case of injury (like this year), while Gonzalez looks more the "one day off a week" kind of guy.

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

Eric Wedge is raising money to fund the return of "Cop Rock" to network television. This statement is plainly false. Do not play David Dellucci.