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Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
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Clifton Phifer Lee. 20-2, 2.32 ERA, 1.05 WHIP, 149 K, 27 BB in 194 1/3 IP. Simply amazing. And all this after being an afterthought to the Indians front office and to most of their fans heading into this season. In his latest, Paulie C checks in from the in-laws in Milwaukee and takes a moment to appreciate what C.P. Lee has accomplished just one year after his disastrous 2007 campaign.



With all of the love being bestowed upon Clifton Phifer Lee (and deservedly so) in the wake of his 20th win, as Gaylord Perry's name gets more run than it has since his HOF induction, and with the probability of the Indians netting their second Cy Young in as many years after a bit of a drought, let's take a moment to appreciate what C.P. Lee has accomplished just one year after his disastrous 2007 campaign.

I'm not going to get into how absurdly awful Lee's 2007 was, but the fact that he was left off the postseason roster last year is a pretty good indication of where he was in the organization's pecking order at the end of 2007. And lest anyone forget, Lee was in a dogfight for the fifth spot in the rotation with Aaron Laffey (who didn't throw strikes in Winter Haven) and Jeremy Sowers when the team spent its final days in Florida. How long ago does that feel today, as Lee's 20th victory is a SportsCenter staple and it's not a stretch to say that the Cy Young

Award engraver is practicing his double f's and double e's.

Truthfully, as I sit here in the land of the "one-hitter", where folks in Milwaukee are somehow convinced that CC will sweep both the NL Cy Young AND the NL MVP, it's hard not to have a bitter edge as the Indians (had their season not hit the commode, for various reasons) started the season with CC and Lee occupying 40% of their rotation. Those two should be providing the one-two punch that the Indians utilized in riding Sabathia and Carmona down the stretch last year to another playoff berth.

Nevertheless, what's done is done and in addition to figuring who fits where for 2009, the Indians' season has been reduced to lauding individual accomplishments and milestones. So, with a 30-30 man already in the clubhouse, the Indians have a 20-game winner to celebrate...and celebrate they should.

A celebration is in order to acknowledge what Lee has put together this year, which is nothing short of astounding:

20-2, 2.32 ERA, 1.05 WHIP, 149 K, 27 BB in 194 1/3 IP over 27 games

Look at those numbers again and you see Lee AVERAGING more than 7 IP per start with over 5 ½ K's to every BB over those 27 games. How good has Lee been in comparison to the rest of the Indians' starters?

I know that wins is an arbitrary statistic, with far better measures of a pitcher's effectiveness out there, but this is how the win totals of the Indians' starters look on the season:

Lee - 20

Byrd - 7

Carmona - 7

Sabathia - 6

Laffey - 5

Sowers - 2

Reyes - 2

Westbrook - 1

Ginter - 1

The Indians' starters have 51 wins this year...and Lee has 20 of them!

The fact that Lee has started just 27 of the 136 games (19.8%)

yet is responsible for nearly 40% of the victories that starters have notched is downright amazing.

To have 20 wins on a team that has won just 66 games total is a mind-blowing statistic, but take things a step further and examine the five games that he started and received a no-decision:

May 12 vs. Toronto - 9 IP, 0 ER, 7 H, 5 K, 2 BB (Indians lost 3-0 when Betancourt gave up 3 in the 10th)

June 14 vs. San Diego - 6 1/3 IP, 2 ER, 8 H, 6 K, 0 BB (Indians lost 8-3 with Kouzmanoff GS in the 10th)

June 20 vs. Los Angeles - 7 1/3 IP, 1 ER, 6 H, 3 K, 1 BB (Indians won 6-4 in 10 after a JoeBo BS in 9th)

July 1 vs. Chicago - 8 IP, 1 ER, 6 H, 3 K, 1 BB (Indians lost 3-2 with JoeBo BS in 10th)

July 30 vs. Detroit - 5 IP, 6 ER, 10 H, 5 KK, 0 BB (Indians lost 14-12 in a shoot-out)

That's it...those are his five no decisions, four of which include blown saves or bullpen blow-ups.

He's given up 4 ER or more in FIVE of his 27 starts and has allowed ZERO ER in eight of his starts! I could just go on and on about the season he's put together - the fact that he leads all starters in the AL in ERA, in quality starts, is second in K/BB, is third in WHIP, and has held opponents to a .602 OPS (again, 2nd best in the AL among starters).

But to me, Lee's 2008 is the surprise that nobody saw coming, the reclamation of a career that seemed (not too long ago) to be on the brink of derailment, a bright ray of sunshine in an otherwise cloudy season. And for those who had written him off (present company included) or are quick to call the Indians' 2008 season a total loss or the first step in a downward descent, it's a reminder that hope does spring eternal and that anything is possible in this crazy game of baseball - Cliff Lee's 20th victory just proved it again.