

## The B-List: 9/3

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, September 03 2008 7:00 PM -

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The Tribe had a chance to deal a solid blow to the White Sox playoffs hopes and sweep them out of Cleveland yesterday afternoon, but alas, it was not to be. The Pale Hoes (playing without five regulars) broke a close game open with a fifth inning home run from Nick Swisher and a sixth inning job from Alexei Ramirez. In today's B-List, Buff breaks down yesterday's loss, and also offers up a thorough statistical analysis of Jeremy Sowers, who looked good before surrendering the two crushing home runs.



### FINAL SCORE

<b>White Sox (78-61)</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Indians (67-71)</b>	0	0	0	0

*W: Vazquez (11-12) L: Sowers (2-8) S: Jenks (28)*

Every time the Indians do something to make you think they're interesting, they slap you in the face with a sizable fish and you realize ... no, they're not.

### 1) Can "Modest Proposals" be radical?

There were a couple starts in a row in late July and early August in which Jeremy Sowers started the game with five perfect innings, and another couple in which he was terrific through three or four. I mean, five perfect innings is kind of a lot of perfect innings. Sure, he fell apart after that, but the fact remains: Jeremy Sowers, under the right circumstances (which have yet to be consistently defined), can get major-league hitters out.

I was hoping to draw some tremendous, profound conclusion from this in looking at Sowers' splits on the season, but ... eh, there's not a lot of profundity to be had.

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Yes, he does seem to have "late early mid-morning" success in games, but keep in mind that these are roughly 60-PA samples here (more like 40 in the last row):

Pitches 1-15: .340/.389/.440 (1 HR, 4 BB, 5 K)

Pitches 16-30: .250/.310/.462 (3 HR, 5 BB, 11 K)

Pitches 31-45: .228/.274/.439 (2 HR, 4 BB, 6 K)

Pitches 46-60: .344/.403/.623 (!!!) (3 HR, 6 BB, 4 K)

Pitches 61-75: .375(!)/.400/.547 (2 HR, 4 BB, 7 K)

Pitches 76-90: .259/.323/.431 (3 HR, 5 BB, 3 K)

Pitches 91-105: .314/.385/.486 (1 HR, 3 BB, 10 K)

By innings:

Inning 1-3: .287/.342/.505 (10 HR, 18 BB, 27 K) (~ 220 PA)

Inning 4-6: .307/.359/.451 (4 HR, 12 BB, 14 K) (~ 170 PA)

Inning 7-9: .409(!)/.435/.682(!!!) (1 HR, 1 BB, 5 K) (~ 25 PA)

The one thing that jumps out is just how sluggerrific Sowers has been: he can give up a home run to any batter, any time, any place, in any inning. When he's tired. When he's fresh. When he's hot. When he's cold. And 10 of the 15 homers he's allowed have come with men on base. I mean, that's shittastic. He gives up a line of .346/.406/.599 with runners on base ... which represents a whopping 44.4% of the plate appearances against Sowers. Saying he needs to develop better pitching out of the stretch seems as obvious as a facial tattoo. Wowzers, that's bad.

But here's the thing: there are flashes of "stuff" there. Sure, it's hidden behind a 1.55 WHIP and a 5.97 ERA and a mediocre 4.68 K/9 rate and a sub-good 1.59 K/BB ratio, but the K rate is his highest of his young major-league career, and the K/BB is better than last year. And he's had a handful of starts now where he's looked simply brilliant, if not entirely dominant.

Yesterday was another one of those starts: he retired the first nine hitters, and retired three in a row to end the 4<sup>th</sup> after putting the first two guys on. But the end of his start had a distinctly Sowerian flair: two home runs, four runs overall, two extra-base hits given up with a man on first. I mean, he pitched really, really well until he didn't, and then he pitched really, really not well.

So, what is the modestly radical radically modest proposal? Well, consider what you expect from a pitching staff as a whole. In a perfect world, you'd require this rotation:

Sidd Finch Jr. (162-0, 1458 IP, 4374 K)

Let's not hold our collective breath for that one.

Instead, let's say that on average, you get 6 innings from a starter and 3 relief pitchers throw an inning apiece. You have plenty of variation: a complete game here, a starter knocked out in the second inning there, a multi-inning outing by a reliever somewhere else, but basically, you have 8 relief pitchers making 60 appearances each and 5 starters throwing about 192 innings each. That's a 13-man staff, so this would be pretty bad (heck, I hate 12-man staffs as it is. Maybe I need more innings from my starters.). But in rough terms, that's kind of a staff.

So let's say that instead of one starter and three relievers pitching the 5<sup>th</sup> day, I use one starter for 4-to-5 innings and a second "starter" to go 4 innings or so, using a closer if necessary.

Yes, yes, matchups and extra innings and yah yah yah, but I think that you could work out such a "tandem start" situation that you see in the minors sometimes to preserve arms. And by absorbing the extra innings that fifth day, you'd save at least one relief pitcher's worth of wear.

Consider Aaron Laffey, who posted (he's been shut down for the year with "elbow tenderness," which sounds ominous, but bear with me here) the following numbers:

Pitches 1-15: .273/.344/.327

Pitches 16-30: .241/.313/.345

Pitches 31-45: .273/.355/.436

Pitches 46-60: .245/.322/.358

Pitches 61-75: .407/.471/.593, frightened small animals

Pitches 76-90: .241/.279/.448

Pitches 91-105: .276/.333/.310

By innings:

Inning 1-3: .256/.337/.367 (~ 200 PA)

Inning 4-6: .291/.348/.455 (~ 180 PA)

Inning 7-9: .409(!)/.462/.455 (~ 25 PA)

Given the number of times that each of these pitchers was surprisingly clean through their first couple trips through a lineup, I think you could make a case that, if Sowers somehow learns to keep the damn ball in the damn park, that these two guys could give you 8 above-average innings. Or maybe not. Maybe I'm trying to catch smoke in a net fixating on Sowers' handful of perfect-first-trips through the lineup. Maybe he's just not very good. Something has to be different next year, though: while I'd like to say that the difference will be a quantum leap in Sowers' performance, I'm not sure why one would expect that to happen.

The other plan involves Sowers growing five inches to get more of a downward plane like Cliff Lee. Searching Tibet for Finch the Younger seems like a better use of resources.

## **2) A contrast in nothing**

All this having been said, consider the difference between the starts of Javier Vazquez and Jeremy Sowers yesterday.

Through the first three innings, each pitcher had faced the minimum 9 hitters without giving up a hit. The only baserunner was Asdrubal Cabrera, who walked and was then picked off

first base.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> inning, Sowers gave up a single and a walk to the first two hitters, but got three quick outs to escape unscathed.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> inning, Vazquez gave up a pair of one-out singles, but got two quick outs to escape unscathed.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> inning, Sowers gave up an extra-base hit to a middle infielder with a man on base to give up two runs.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> inning, Vazquez gave up an extra-base hit to a middle infielder with two men on base to give up two runs.

Overall, Sowers gave up 6 hits, 1 walk, and 5 Ks in 5 1/3 innings. Vazquez gave up 5 hits, 1 walk, and 5 Ks in 6 innings.

About the only difference between the base numbers is that Vazquez threw some more strikes (74 in 108 pitches to 60 in 92 pitches, a 3.3% difference in strike rate) and gave up one fewer extra-base hit. Oh, and the home run thing. Basically, had Alexei Ramirez not golfed a pretty good pitch over the wall, the outings are more-or-less identical.

Well, identical except for one factor: Chicago hitters fouled off 23 of Jeremy Sowers' pitches, while Cleveland hitters

fouled off 24 of Vazquez' (although 7 were in one at-bat by Grady Sizemore who ultimately struck out swinging, and 6 by Asdrubal Cabrera, who walked). But Cleveland hitters swung and missed at 17 of Vazquez' offerings, while Sowers induced THREE swings and misses. Three. Ninety-two pitches, and the White Sox missed THREE of them.

That, my friends, is a huge, huge difference. THAT'S probably what has to change more than anything else. Three.

### **3) The season in a microcosm**

Vazquez, with an ERA of 4.34, was the pitcher with the highest ERA for Chicago. No other pitcher had an ERA over 4.

Jensen Lewis, with an ERA of 4.28, was the pitcher with the *lowest* ERA for Cleveland. No other pitcher had an ERA *under* 5.

#### **4) Welcome to the bigs!**

Rich Rundles, a roster-bloating September callup, threw four pitches to left-handed pinch-hitter Jim Thome. The first pitch was a ball. The second pitch was a ball. The

third pitch, not a strike. The fourth pitch, almost exactly like a strike except for its location outside the strike zone.

I hope that Rich Rundles gets to throw a strike in the major leagues before the season is out. I also hope that he has this capability.

## **5) Dept. of Flabbergastation**

Not only did Juan Rincon pitch 2 1/3 scoreless innings ... not only was there a single baserunner on a single ... not only did he strike out two and walk a mere zero ... but he threw 24 strikes in 35 pitches.

## **6) Ho Hum Dept.**

Raffy Betancourt threw 9 strikes in 10 pitches, striking out Alexei Ramirez on three pitches (two fouls and a miss) with a runner on first to end the 8<sup>th</sup> and continuing into the 9<sup>th</sup> before giving way to Rundles. He retired all three men he faced.

## **7) Squander Ball Inaction!**

The Indians couldn't muster much against Vazquez, but consider what happened after he left the game.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> inning, Sal Fasano drew a one-out walk, Cabrera beat out a two-out bunt single (both off Octavio Dotel), and Grady Sizemore drew a walk off left-handed reliever Matt Thornton. With the bases loaded and two outs, the pinch-hitter for David Dellucci flew out to center field to end the threat.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> inning, Ben Francisco hit a leadoff single off Thornton, Shin-Soo Choo, allowed to bat against the lefty, rewarded Eric Wedge with a single of his own, then Bobby Jenks was summoned to face Ryan Garko, who promptly grounded into a 5-4-3 double play on the second pitch to end the

inning.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> inning, Jamey Carroll's leadoff single was erased on Kelly Shoppach's 4-6-3 double play before Cabrera ended the game with a 3-pitch swinging K.

For those of you counting at home, that's six baserunners in three innings and zero runs. The White Sox had nine baserunners for the ENTIRE GAME. And they

**WON.**

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

Jhonny Peralta smashed a two-out two-run double to produce Cleveland's runs.

Cleveland drove in 100% of their runs with two outs.

Choo had a pair of hits, including the one off the lefty, and is now hitting .288/.383/.517 on the season, including .250/.316/.423 off left-handed pitching (about 60 PA).

Asdrubal Cabrera reached base three times on a pair of singles and a walk, and was only picked off once.

Andy Marte wore pants.