

The B-List: 9/10

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A second win, a second dominant performance by a young lefty: this time, it's Scott Lewis throttling the Orioles in his major-league debut. In today's B-List, Buff applauds Lewis' fine performance, but wonders whether this might mark the high-water event of Lewis' career. He also notes that Kelly Shoppach helped Lewis with his glove, arm, and bat, that Asdrubal Cabrera might consider a different approach at the plate, and wonders if Jon Meloan is a chimera. Go Tribe!



FINAL SCORE				
Indians (71-73)	1	0	0	3
Orioles (64-80)	0	0	0	0

W: S. Lewis (1-0) L: Waters (2-3)

Wait, didn't I just see this game? Did STO run a replay of Tuesday and not tell anyone?

1) Welcome to the bigs!

Scott Lewis could hardly have had a more impressive major-league debut: with 8 scoreless innings in an efficient 96 pitches (67 strikes), Lewis now stands tied with

some other pitchers with the highest career major-league winning percentage in baseball history. And it wasn't a Nagyesque "scattered 10 hits" kind of scoreless, either: Lewis allowed only three hits and zero walks while striking out three, and one of the baserunners was eliminated on a strikeout-throwout double play trying to steal second base. Only one of the hits was for extra bases (a double), and that was the only runner to get as far as second base (he made it to third before being stranded). I mean, one guy in scoring position in 8 innings ... that's damned good stuff.

Five of Lewis' eight innings were perfect, and six involved facing the minimum because of the double play. To say the Orioles never threatened would understate how feeble their offense looked against Lewis: the Orioles didn't just "not threaten," they virtually capitulated, using the Vichy France approach to offense.

And this is where I have to profess that there's at least one seat left on the Scott Lewis Bandwagon, because I'm not sitting in it.

Look, there's no way you can say that Lewis' outing wasn't wildly successful: it was. Eight 3-hit innings in 96 pitches is really great. It's just that the path he took to get there makes me wonder how much "there" is actually *there*.

For example, Lewis struck out three guys without walking any. That makes for an excellent (infinitely so, one might say) K/BB ratio, but it isn't much of a K/9 ratio. And although he picked up his rate for missing bats later in the game, the Orioles fouled off 5 pitches before they missed one, and 12 before they missed a second. (Final count: 19 fouls, 7 misses) The highlight I saw of Lewis striking out a hitter involved him pumping a high (chest or so) fastball past a hitter ... at 88 mph.? No one should throw a high fastball 88 mph unless he is Tim Wakefield or "high" is defined as "six feet." (Eight if it's Vlad Guerrero.)

To this end, Lewis induced 6 ground ball outs to a whopping 14 flies: pitchers

have certainly been successful as flyball pitchers in the past, but few of them topped out at 88 mph. (It's possible Lewis hits 90, but the point remains.) All those flies end up increasing the chances that one of them ends up in someone's beer, and unless Manny Ramirez is playing left field, that's usually a bad thing for a pitcher (cf. Elarton, S.; Byrd, P.).

Truthfully, I don't know if this is Lewis' M.O. from the minors, or if this was an aberration. Or, heck, if Lewis saw something in the Orioles approach and took advantage of it. And Lewis does seem to have above-average secondary stuff, including a nice change and a good curve. So it's not inconceivable that Lewis can put his injury woes behind him and become a solid major-league starter. I'm just saying that I wouldn't go etching this guy's name in stone for the 2009 Cleveland rotation just yet.

2) How to help your rookie pitcher in his debut, by Kelly Shoppach

Shoppach came into the season being considered a backup who had a little more on the ball defensively than Victor Martinez, based (among other things) on his ability to throw out would-be basestealers at a 36+% clip. Although throwing out runners is not necessarily the best way to evaluate catching defense, it's one of the most-visible, and is an easy number to call up on a stat sheet.

Ironically, that part of Shoppach's game hasn't been very good this season: he's only caught 8 of 41 stealers for a 19.5% clip, which got Martinez excoriated when he'd put up that figure. In addition, an early-season flurry led Shoppach to cough up 8 passed balls, which is pretty lousy for a guy who doesn't catch a knuckler or many splitters. (For comparison, Martinez once allowed 9 in 2004, but never more than 6 in any other season.)

On the other hand, Shoppach became the de facto "personal catcher" for a couple pitchers: Paul Byrd last year and Cliff Lee this season. Now, it's hard to tease out a lot of statistical significance from "catcher's ERA," but it

seems perfectly plausible that a pitcher might prefer throwing to one guy over another (Greg Maddux comes to mind here). And you have to say, although it's hard to quantify exactly what contribution Shoppach made to Lewis' fine outing, the fact remains that Lewis had a very fine outing, and I don't find it unreasonable to give Shoppach a share of the credit there.

But more than anything behind the plate, you know what makes a pitcher feel comfortable? A lead. And to that end, Shoppach was masterful, racking up more runs and RBI than the entire Orioles' team just by himself. With an opposite-field drive off Chris Waters in the 5th and a second homer off Randor Bierd in the 7th, Shoppach not only gave his pitcher a bigger lead to work with, but ended a week-long homerless drought for the Tribe. Overall, Shoppach went 3-for-4 with 3 R and 2 RBI, also drawing a walk.

3) Who?

Randor Bierd? Who named this guy, J.R.R. Tolkien? Are we looking to draft his brothers Gandalf and Elrond? Ordinarily with a name like "Buffum" I tend to avoid such questions, but "Randor"? Is that Norwegian for "He Who Hangs Sliders"?

4) Psst ... the ducks are still out there

Scoring 7 runs on 11 hits beats scoring 3 runs on 14 hits, but it should be noted that 6 of the 9 baserunners the Indians stranded were in scoring position, so we could still use a little work in that regard.

However, we did score three runs on sacrifice flies, so it's a bit encouraging that with a guy on third and fewer than 2 outs, the team appears to understand that it's not necessary to anything particularly heroic to score a run. We could have used more of that earlier.

5) Droob boink!

In the box score it looks like a "smash," but really, Asdrubal Cabrera's two-run double down the right-field line was more of a well-placed hit than anything so grandiose. This is in no way meant to denigrate its contribution: it was a fine piece of hitting to take a ball away and drive it with some small authority out into right.

Last season, Cabrera had a huge platoon split, hitting .259/.353/.348 as a left-handed hitter, while pounding lefties as a right-hander to the tune of .340/.354/.596. Now, of course, this is in 47 AB (about 50 PA), so these numbers don't have a huge value. But it bears mentioning that with similar proportions and a little bit more sample (229 AB left-handed, 71 right-handed), Cabrera is again posting a .218/.318/.297 line left-handed and a .310/.390/.465 right-handed. He has as many doubles as a right-hander as he does as a left-hander in fewer than a third of the at-bats. He also strikes out less frequently: 57 in 229 lefty, but 11 in 71 righty. Again, these are not large samples, and all of Cabrera's samples come with the huge "split season" factor, where he hit like excrement before being sent down and is hitting very well since (.184/.282/.247 pre-All Star, .303/.393/.437 after). But the suggestion has to be made: is it worth considering asking Cabrera to bat right-handed all the time? My guess is no, but ... well ... just think about it, okay?

6) Okay, who do I have to set on fire to see more Jon Meloan or less Masa Kobayashi?

Please, Eric, Yosh is toast. He's beat. Please. No more. I know it, you know it, the American people know it. He's done. He should be able to come back next season and be a fine contributor. It just takes some rest. But really ... for the love of Elmo ... the man is out of gas. Stop trotting him out there. His back half is horrific. Shut him down. What else are you going to learn at this point?

Here's what I know about Jon Meloan:

- a) He's apparently been given an "h" now, although I think he missed a real opportunity to be known as "Jhon"; instead of the more pedestrian "John";
- b) He wears #59.

That's it. All I got. Is there a point to him being here?

7) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

The right fielder, starting in place of Shin-Soo Choo against the lefty, smacked a single and a double, was hit by a pitch, scored a run, and stole his 7th base. He hit .302/.355/.523 in August, and although his small-sample September has him batting .222, his OBP is .348. Not

bad. In fact, post-All Star break, he's hit .259/.316/.476. I mean, that's nearly Jhonny Peralta. Okay, so I'm comparing a corner outfielder to a shortstop and getting the wrong weighting. But it sure beats what I got before that (.216/.264/.315). (I still say he's bait.)

Jamey Carroll, playing third base for no discernable reason, rewarded Wedge with a 2-for-4 night, a walk, a run scored, and a fine barehanded play to end the game.

Ben Francisco smashed a double, as did Ryan Garko.

Brendan Donnelly did not pitch.

8) Box Score Follies

The Indians (Lewis and Kobayashi) needed 108 pitches to complete the game.

Starter Chris Waters needed 109 pitches to make it 2/3^{rds} of the way through the SIXTH.