

The B-List: 9/15

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Scott Freaking Lewis! Wow! The former Buckeye remained unscored upon, and has now started his major league career with 14 scoreless frames, the best start for an Indians pitcher since 1969. In today's B-List, Buff analyzes the start to Lewis's career, talks about Squander Ball, talks Raffies, and also hits on the production of Kelly Shoppach and Shin Soo-Choo. It's The B-List! **FINAL SCORE**

Twins (82-68)	0	0	0	0
Indians (73-77)	0	0	0	1



W: S. Lewis (2-0) L: Slowey (12-10) S: J. Lewis (9)

Somewhere out there is a Brewers columnist whose outrageous lies about Doug Melvin render me speechless with envy.

1) Yes, I see you have seats available: they look most comfortable, but for now, I must refrain

The most likely explanation for a terrific major-league debut is that it was a flat-out fluke: the number of times that a pitcher gives up 3 hits, 0 walks, and 0 runs in 8

complete innings is simply not that large. Consider that Cliff Lee, in his Career Year To End All Career Years, has exactly ONE START that meets all four of these criteria (or better): April 24. In EVERY OTHER START, the probable Cy Young winner either gave up more hits or walked somebody. So to place a whole lot of significance on Scott Lewis' outstanding debut is probably so much stardust-induced sky pie. Lewis isn't that good, for the simple reason that NO ONE is *that* good. He looked great, and that's about as far as I'm comfortable taking that.

Against the oft-punchless Twins, Lewis gave up the same three hits, although two were for doubles, including one to Nick Punto, which is akin to interrupting your hilarious standup comedy routine with a spot-on Ben Bernanke imitation. He did walk two batters, but struck out 5 in 6 innings of work. Both walks were to Alexi Casilla, both on 3-2 counts after Casilla had already fouled off one 3-2 offering, so it wasn't like Lewis was scattershot. It could even be argued that Lewis was pitching carefully to Casilla because the next two hitters, Joe Mauer and Justin Morneau, are left-handed, and Lewis has never given up a hit to a left-handed hitter in the majors.

(Okay, that's probably reading a little too much into that. I mean, Mauer hits .321 and Morneau hits .310, is an MVP contender, has an MVP, and won the Home Run Derby. It's one thing to be confident, but quite another to expect better results pitching twice to Joe Mauer and Justin Morneau with a runner on base than to Alexi Casilla with the bases empty. That would suggest a preponderance of heavy metals in the water at Ohio State. Come to think of it, this might explain Todd Boeckmann's performance Saturday as well. Hm ... let me get back to you on that.)

So, is it better to get 0 BB and 3 K in 8 IP, or 2 BB and 5 K in 6 IP? Well, that's actually a pretty dumb question. Baserunners bad, fire good. Or, baserunners bad, fire also bad. Something like that. But I will say this: the two walks to Casilla didn't bother me tremendously because of their circumstances, and the 5 Ks encouraged me. I can stop short of the original ledger balance and still appreciate that result.

The walks and Ks did make Lewis less efficient this time around: he needed 98 pitches to complete his sixth inning, only 63 of them strikes, which is a bit short of tremendous. But look: the man gave up three hits and no runs: he posted a second consecutive game with a sub-1.00 WHIP, and collected nearly a strikeout an inning, including three swinging. Okay, two of them were Denard Span. Sue me.

Lewis actually struck out 5 of the first 10 hitters he faced: whether he decided to change his approach to be more efficient or the Twins' hitters finally figured out how his ball moved is a matter of conjecture, but his second inning in which he threw 13 strikes in 16 pitches and collected three Ks was pretty masterful. The bandwagon, however, must remain me-free for now, unless you are asking me if I choose Lewis over Jeremy Sowers, in which case I'll go with the Devil I don't know. The Devil I know hurts my adenoids. (And, for what it's worth, Lewis seems to have some natural sink in the vein of Aaron Laffey, which I prefer to Sowers' repertoire of gophers, taters, and ahoogahs.)

2) Raffy Time!

Note: this is not the same thing as [Raffi](#) Time, which results in cerebral hemorrhage and insipidness.

After an outing like this, I almost want to end the season, shrink-wrap each Raffy, and go into next season with both of them having their last memory being one of the kind of effectiveness we saw in 2007. Alas, this would kill both of them, so instead of "Raffy Right" and "Raffy Left," we would end up with "Raffy Dead" and "Raffy Also Dead." This would not only cause great mourning in their respective countries, but would increase the chances of more Juan Rincon, which, unlike Thneeds, nobody, nobody, *nobody* needs.

Still, this is the kind of outing that was so common in 2007 and so rare and

precious in 2008: each Raffy faced the minimum three batters, Betencourt erasing a single with a double play and throwing a cretunkulous 11 strikes in 13 pitches, while Perez was a little less accurate while being a little more dominant (1 K in a perfect inning). I refuse to use the Hold statistic as evidence of anything but the idea that not all statistics are meaningful, but these were fine performances nonetheless, and Perez does have 22 of them. Huzzah, I suppose.

But it was good pitching.

3) Smallball takes a holiday

The Indians scored three runs, three of which scored on home runs.

The Twins scored one run, one of which scored on a home run.

The teams combined to put 19 men on base, scored 4 runs, and left only 10 on base. This is because each team grounded into a pair of double plays and Jhonny Peralta was thrown out at home trying to score from second on a single.

Grady Sizemore stole a base ... immediately before Shin-Soo Choo hit a home run to render it entirely moot.

4) Squander Ball, on the other hand, is still available

Cleveland seems to strand an inordinate number of runners at third with fewer than two outs. I don't know the exact numbers (or even how to look them up, really), but it sure seems like a lot more than other teams. This is particularly frustrating because it doesn't take a lot of great hitting to score a runner from third

with zero or one out(s): instead of a hit, you could get a sac fly or a slow roller or a groundout to the hole or a wild pitch or a decent bunt. New York beat Aaron Laffey in his first start by hitting ground balls to Ryan Garko, for example. You just don't have to be that outstanding to score a run there.

Instead, Cleveland seems to produce a preponderance of strikeouts and infield popups. They're certainly not going to try to squeeze (probably defensible in that the players who can bunt also tend to be the players who can run: if you have a good bunter at the plate, you likely have someone very Garko at third, and if speed is at third, you probably have someone from the Cliff Lee School of Bunting at the plate), but is it too much to ask that someone just hit the ball kinda ordinarily?

Well, consider the 8th inning.

After loading the bases on two singles and a four-pitch walk, Travis Hafner got the call with the sacks full and no one out. He hit a sharp grounder to first ... good, right? The guy on third even had some speed. But it was TOO sharp and Minnesota actually uses brain cells on defense and the replacement left fielder was forced out at home.

And then, Kelly Shoppach showed why striking out is not the worst thing you can do with the bases loaded and one out. (Hint: it rhymes with "flounded into a double play.")

Would Mike Aubrey have gotten a hit? Should Hafner have tried to loft the ball? Am I making something out of very little? Of course I am. So what? I hate scoring zero runs after loading the bases with no outs.

5) Shin Plaster

I am not altogether a big fan of the swing Shin-Soo Choo used to hit the two-run homer that effectively won the game for the Indians: it was a true golf-swing down-and-up uppercut at an inside pitch that Choo lifted over the right field wall. On the other hand, that's where the pitch was, and that's how you hit that pitch. Complaining about the aesthetics of a home run swing seems a bit ungrateful at best.

Still, one of the legitimate questions about Choo was whether he would hit for enough power to be considered even a regular platoon partner. The other question was whether he could hit lefties well enough to play every day. We've talked about the lefty issue, in that he's doing well enough in this season's tiny sample to at least be encouraging: as for the power, consider that Choo has 11 homers and 40 extra-base hits out of 84 total. He's slugging .538 in about 320 or so PA: as a point of reference, Grady Sizemore slugs .510, and this is almost ONE HUNDRED POINTS more than Ben Francisco (.441).

That seems like enough.

6) Oh yeah?

Well, Kelly Shoppach is slugging .544, tops on the team amongst those players with more than 3 AB.

Shoppach actually hit his homer in about the same place as Choo: a little less distance, but that's the opposite way for Shoppach. And his plate discipline isn't bad: his OBP of .345 is seventy points higher than his AVG of .272. Now, frankly, I'm not sure I see Shoppach as a "real" .272 hitter: I've always thought of him as more of a .250/.300/.480 guy who could hit pretty well for a catcher and with some good power, but not *really* well.

Well, one might say, on what would you base this? Because the numbers are what they are: he IS hitting .272/.345/.544 and he DOES have 47 extra-base hits (21 HR, 26 2B: you are not getting many triples from Kelly Shoppach). Who's to say this isn't his true level of performance?

His minor-league track record does, for example. In 2005 in Pawtucket, he only hit .253/.352/.507, which is more OBP than I remembered, but still doesn't translate to very much at the major-league level. Splitting time between Beafalo and Cleveland in 2006, he hit .282 in AAA, but .245 in the majors, which is roughly the same thing. And last year, his plate discipline cratered and his .262 AVG produced only a .316 OBP, which just isn't very good.

The respected PECOTA projection system tries to use weighted data from past performance, the age of the player, and the performance of players in history with similar physical builds, performance at that age, and position. It's "baseline" 50th percentile for Shoppach was a rather pessimistic .230/.305/.413. Frankly, I'm not sure why those numbers are so low. He'd always shown power and just finished hitting .261 at the major-league level at age 27. But the system is what it is, and it's one of the better ones around.

One interesting thing to look at is the "90th percentile" projection: these are the numbers a guy might hit if he has a really good year. Whether this is a career fluke or a talent breakout or what have you, PECOTA doesn't care. But Shoppach's 90th percentile projection was .270/.348/.504 ... which is just a little bit worse than what he's actually doing (he has more power than PECOTA's wildest dreams). It's pretty close. And another feature is a list of chances that the player will Breakout (blossom into a much better player), Improve (just get better), Collapse (crater into a much more David Dellucci), or Attrition (drop out of the league, often by injury). Catchers by the nature of their job will have higher Attrition rates. Shoppach's, for example was a very high 38%, with a 34% Collapse, 43% Improve, and 21% Breakout. I interpret these numbers as meaning that PECOTA understood that Shoppach had talent at was hitting a peak performance age range, but as a catcher might get bowled over and end up severely hobbled.

In short, it had no idea.

I would respectfully submit that now we do.

7) Teaser

Andy Marte collected his third multi-hit game in his last five starts. Only one of the 7 hits he has in his last six games (counting a 1-AB pinch-hitting appearance Sunday) was as much as a double, but it's a 7-for-17 string, and he would have had an RBI had Jhonny Peralta run more like Usain Bolt and less like Saddam Hussein (who is dead).

Can Andy Marte actually hit? It's ... it's possible, I suppose. Grumble, grumble. I still think he's a schmoe. But I'll tell you what: pinch-hitting for him late in a game in which he has hits (which, in fairness, did not happen last night: it's just that it has happened like five times) is infuriating.

8) Random Thought

Should a guy named Kevin Slowey pitch more like Jamie Moyer?

9) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Mike Aubrey got a hit and a walk in three trips to the plate; Jhonny Peralta squeezed the same positives out of four trips.

Grady Sizemore stole his 38th base of the season. (With 31 homers, he's not going 40/40. But it's still been a tremendous season.)

Jensen Lewis picked up his 9th save in 10 tries despite giving up a solo shot. I'll take it.