

The B-List: 4/8

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Wednesday, April 08 2009 7:00 PM -

Unbeknownst to the Indians, the major-league season started April 6. Buff is ready for the guys to start showing up, and in today's B-List, he touches on a subpar outing from Fausto Carmona, the pointless cosmetic production from the middle of the order, and wonders aloud if hitting 1-for-16 with runners in scoring position is perhaps something the Indians should strive to avoid in the future. (Hint: yes.)

	FINAL	1	2	3
Indians (0-2) (1.5 GB)		0	0	1
Rangers (2-0)	0	4	0	0



W: Padilla (1-0) L: Carmona (1-0) S: F. Francisco (1)

Imagine my dismay when I found out that the Cleveland Indians would be playing a game in archetypical April Indians Fashion last night.

1) ¡F***to!

Last season, Fausto Carmona had a serious problem. He could not control the ball in the strike zone, resulting in an Epic Fail K:BB ratio of 58:70, walking more than a batter every two innings. Carmona wasn't ever necessarily going to be a great strikeout pitcher: in his wonderful 2007, he still managed only 5.74 K/9. This was mitigated by one of the best groundball rates in the majors, on par with the Jake Westbrook and Brandon Webbs of the world: it's okay to pitch to contact to a certain extent if the contact you induce isn't likely to result in anything terribly serious.

But last season, not only were the walks way up (I mean WAY up: from 61 in 215 IP to 70 in a mere 120 2/3), but the strikeouts were down (to 4.33 K/9). Fat, drunk, and stupid may be no way to go through life, but walking 5 guys a game while striking out only 4 is just plain ill-advised. (For the record, Carmona is not fat, and I have reason to believe he was not drunk, either.)

So it was good to start last night's game with a strikeout of Ian Kinsler, even if it was probably not a Real Strikeout, as Kinsler seemed awfully convinced he made contact with the ball that Victor Martinez subsequently dropped. It was less good to walk Michael Young on five pitches, but the next two batters grounded out, and it looked very much like Vintage Fausto.

Until it didn't: Nelson Cruz led off the next inning with a homer to left. Let's go to the videotape, courtesy of MLB.com's pitchf/X:

Carmona's fastest pitch to Cruz was 93 mph.

Carmona's slowest pitch to Cruz was 92 mph.

Four of the five pitches thrown to Cruz were above the middle of the thigh.

Now, Nelson Cruz can hit. He's always been a guy who needed regular playing time more than any further development. But damn, you can't just throw the guy a diet of elevated pitches at the same damn speed, no matter where they're ostensibly moving.

Is this an accident? Consider Chris Davis with one out:

93 mph fastball

93 mph fastball, single

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Or Jarrod Saltalamacchia with one out:

92 mph sinker
92 mph fastball
92 mph fastball
93 mph fastball, double to the wall, RBI

Or Elvis Andrus with one out:

92 mph fastball, infield single

Or Ian Kinsler with one out:

92 mph fastball
93 mph sinker
92 mph fastball
93 mph fastball
86 mph slider, double

(Caveat: I am not convinced pitch f/X identifies the type of pitch well.)

Look, it's not a perfect match: Kinsler hit the pitch that was at a different speed, and Josh Hamilton ended the inning because he couldn't hit the third pitch of a 93-91-93 sequence. 93 mph is nothing to sneeze at. But damn, that's 12 pitches in a row in a 1-mph epsilon band! Whether that's Carmona's fault or Victor Martinez', I can't say, but I can say this: I don't care for it.

Carmona ended the day with 4 Ks and 2 BBs, which is a real step up from last

year. But he also ended it with a GO:FO ratio of 6:5 and gave up 5 extra-base hits, which is a real step down from Matt Ginter. That's just bad. Stop being bad!

2) Full of sound, fury, and ducks, signifying nothing

Cleveland's first run of the game was a real Plate Discipline Special: with runners at first and second and the Rangers looking forward to noted speedster Ryan Garko on deck prepping for another double play, Shin-Soo Choo drew a full-count walk to load the bases, then watched helplessly as Garko fell behind looking at strike 2 to run the count to 1-2. But then Garko took a ball, spoiled two offerings from Vicenta Padilla, and cleverly received his customary plunking to drive in a run.

However, the next two batters proved a lot more representative of yesterday's lietmotif: blowing walruses with runners in scoring position. Ben Francisco flied out, and Asdrubal Cabrera whiffed, and that was the end of that. A hit there, and the game is a lot more interesting.

In all, Indians' batters came to the plate 16 times with a runner in scoring position.

Let me rephrase that: SIXTEEN F*#^ING TIMES. Sixteen! Sixteen times!

They got ONE HIT.

Now, it should be noted that the one hit was a magnificent hit, a wonderful hit, a n'est plus ultra hit being a two-run shot by Francisco. And it should also be said that two of the "non-hits" were actually comically butchered by the Rangers and resulted in a run scored and an inning extension, and there were a couple walk/HBPs, but still, 1-for-16 with RISP would make the pre-2008 version

of Casey Blake look like Pat Tabler with the bases loaded. That's just putrid.

3) "Just" putrid?

Well, no, actually, it's a bit more than that, it's like "supra-putrid," because of the 15 times a Cleveland hitter did not get a hit with a runner in scoring position, 5 of them were strikeouts. The Indians struck out nine times in all yesterday, and they saved *more than half* of them for situations in which just hitting the damned ball might have resulted in more scoring, especially given how clownishly the Rangers were playing defense last night.

4) A hearty heart

Travis Hafner is not exactly "back," but he did have a single (to left) and a walk yesterday for an OBP of .400 for the game. Sure, you want him to drive in runs, too, but I'll take a .400 OBP from Hafner this season.

Victor Martinez gained his .400 OBP the old-fashioned way: by swinging at every pitch, moth, and fluttering hotdog wrapper in Forgotten Name Stadium That Isn't The Ballpark In Arlington Any More. Really, two hits is very nice, but it should be noted that two of Martinez' fly outs came within three doses of creatine from being extra-base hits. He may never be VICTOR MARTINEZ! again, but he's certainly not Injured Victor Martinez any more.

Jhonny Peralta's .400 OBP was much the same as Hafner's: a single, a walk, and a complete inability to produce with runners on base.

But look, you get .400 OBP from your 3-4-5 hitters, you ought to score some runs, even if by profligate largesse on the part of your opponent's glove-buttering.

5) Welcome to the club!

All Joe Smiff did was come in with a runner on first, erase him with a double play, and strike out the other hitter he faced (two strikes swinging). Now, Elvis Andrus is thirteen years old and may never have seen a delivery like Smiff's before, but still, a perfect inning in nine pitches can show up in my Indians bullpen box score any time it wants.

6) I would welcome you to the club, but I am not convinced you realize you've arrived yet

After getting excited by his clutch hitting in the World Baseball Classic and a fine spring, I was ready for Mark DeRosa to hit the ground running. Instead, he hit the ground with a spectacular face-plant. His second consecutive o-fer (with 2 Ks) brings his OPS to a massive .111 because he's walked once. Forget hitting his weight: I would accept him hitting his AGE at this point.

Now listen, I know it's two games and DeRosa will be a valuable player for us this season. He will clearly hit more than .034 this season (although he is currently 34 points shy of this). It's two games and 9 plate appearances. But let's get a damn hit, okay?

7) Speaking of infielders

Asdrubal Cabrera: 0-for-7, 3 K, .000 OPS

Mark DeRosa: 0-for-8, 3 K, 1 BB, .111 OPS

Jhonny Peralta: 1-for-7, 2 K, 1 BB, .393 OPS

On a scale of 1 to Crappy, that's 1.6 Crappies. And I don't mean the fish.

8) Dept. of Raffies

Raffy Betancourt looked really good, throwing 10 strikes in 16 pitches and striking out 2 hitters. Well, I mean, except for the solo shot.

Raffy Perez looked pretty good, blunderbussing his way to 11 strikes in 23 pitches, but still striking out a hitter and inducing a pair of weak infield outs. Well, I mean, except for the solo shot.

I have a request.

9) Gark smash!

Well, actually, Ben Francisco smash, but Ryan Garko did pound a shot to right center that might make it out of some ballparks. His RBI double puts him at .333/.500/.667 on the young season, which is a lot better than Early 2008 Ryan Garko. I would like that.