

## The B-List: 4/23

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After being throttled for 7 innings by Gil Meche, the Indians exploded for 4 runs in the bottom of the 8th to win their first series of the season. Buff addresses the fundamental inaccuracy of Anthony Reyes, the potential resurgence of Jensen Lewis, and the comical butchery of the Tribe on both the basepaths and in the field in today's B-List. Bring on the Twins!



<b>FINAL</b>	1	2	3	4
<b>Royals (8-7)</b>	0	0	1	0
<b>Indians (6-10) (2.5 GB)</b>	0	1	0	0

W: J. Lewis (2-2) L: Meche (1-1) S: K. Wood (3)

It's such a pleasant change of pace to have a lot of runs scored late in the game because the OTHER team's bullpen practices Epic Fail.

### 1) The flat brim helps balance on the tightrope

Anthony Reyes ended up giving up fewer runs than his counterpart, Gil Meche, but he most certainly did not PITCH better than Meche. I'll look at Meche's performance in a minute, but on the surface, Reyes' start looks quite good: 2 R in 6 IP, including only 4 H (1 for extra-bases, an RBI double by Alberto Collapse-o) and a somewhat uncharacteristic 5 Ks. Reyes came into the game with only 3 Ks in 11 IP, so this was quite welcome: since his K rates have always been on the low side, this is probably no more than a spike, but it would come in very handy if Reyes could find an "out pitch."

Part of the reason this would be so handy is that Reyes seems to have a lot of

"out of the strike zone" pitches. Reyes walked another 4 batters yesterday, bringing his season total to 10. He has walked at least three hitters in each of his three starts, and threw a meager 56.6% of his pitches for strikes. He started one of the four hitters in the first inning with a strike and went to 3-ball counts on each of the last two hitters. If not for Billy Butler's ill-advised swing at the 3-0 pitch, there's a pretty decent probability that Reyes would have lost him as he had David DeJesus before him, setting up the Royals for a potential big inning.

Of course, there was one potential big inning that Reyes weaseled out of in grand fashion: after walking Butler on 4 pitches in the 4<sup>th</sup> (perhaps Bubba had learned something from his first plate appearance), Reyes gave up a sharp single to Mark Teahen and Ben Francisco comically misplayed a routine loping liner by Mike Jacobs into a bases-loaded no-out situation.

Part of what makes this situation so troublesome for a pitcher is that it doesn't take anything particularly good to push a run across: a double play still scores a run, unless it's an oddball 6-2-3 or something. A decent fly will score a run. Just about anything but a strikeout is bad, and Reyes is not a strikeout pitcher.

To his credit, he didn't seem to try to force John Buck to strike out, merely to miss making real, solid contact, and his pop fly to short right was deemed too risky for Bubbler to try to score from third. Reyes DID then strike out Mike Aviles, who is beginning to look like the biggest one-season gork on the planet at this point, and when Mitch Maier (who is this guy?) flew out on the next pitch, Reyes had escaped the inning.

Reyes did give up a second run in the 5<sup>th</sup> on a single, walk, sacrifice, and execrable throw by Ryan Garko, but really: when you put two guys

in scoring position with none out, there are only so many times you can go to the well without getting wet. His 6

th was quite excellent, striking out Jacobs and Buck swinging and getting Maier to fly out after a single, but by that point, Reyes was already at 106 pitches and that was enough of that.

If you're a regular reader of this column, you might know that I tend to like ground balls better than fly balls, but the one thing I really, really insist on is *strikes*. They don't necessarily have to be missed, they don't have to be high-velocity, they just have to be *frequent*. I like strikes.

Strikes are good. Throw more strikes.

In all seriousness, when you get a Quality Start from your nominal 5<sup>th</sup> starter, especially up against the other team's #1 starter, you take that every time. Reyes' three starts have gotten progressively better, but with all the walks and 3-ball counts, Reyes looks like a guy who is very unlikely to ever give you a 7<sup>th</sup> (much less 8<sup>th</sup>) inning: again, this is the 5<sup>th</sup> starter, and this is hardly a deal-breaking issue, but the bullpen isn't getting the day off when Anthony Reyes is the starter.

On the other hand, the team does tend to WIN when Anthony Reyes is the starter (4-2 last season, 2-1 this

season), so with all due respect to the gift horses in the audience, don't show me your teeth.

## 2) The Mighty Lew!

Reliever statistics can be very misleading: because they tend to throw an inning at a time, it takes a long time to counterbalance the three-run homer they're eventually going to give up over the course of the season. It could be a month of appearances before that 27.00 ERA drops back down into the 3s or 4s where the reliever's Ostensible True Value lies. A guy should certainly have more scoreless outings than scoring ones, but using ERA is a questionable measure of worth. And, of course, in April, even a frequently-used reliever only has about a long start's worth of innings under his belt, so the small sample warnings are magnified, not to mention the oddball nature of inherited runs that plagues good reliever evaluation.

Still, it's hard to argue that Jensen Lewis has been very good thus far in 2009. He hasn't. He's given up earned

runs in 4 of his 8 appearances, and a WHIP of 1.86 is simply dreadful. He's given up 4 homers in 9 2/3 innings, which is very poor indeed, even after controlling for the jet stream in Arlington and the Popup Zone in New Yankee Stadium (3 of his 4 homers have come in these two parks). His numbers are skewed by a terrible 4-hit 3-walk 2-run 1-homer outing in KC on April 15<sup>th</sup> (a game, oddly enough, that he WON): without that outing, he has a more-sane 4.50 ERA, a more-mediocre 1.375 WHIP, and an actually-superior 8:2 K:BB ratio in 8 IP. On the other hand, his numbers are his numbers. You don't get to magically remove one outing and turn Lewis into a much better pitcher.

Still, Lewis serves an important role in the bullpen in that he can go multiple innings when asked: 3 of his 8 outings have been more than 3 outs, and yesterday's outing was especially valuable: with Meche in the process of mowing down 16 Indians in a row, Lewis pitched a perfect 7<sup>th</sup> and struck out Butler to start the 8<sup>th</sup>

. He gave up a double to Teahen which Trevor Crowe butchered into a de facto triple, but after

walking Jacobs, Lewis got Buck to line into a double play, cementing Mike Jacobs' reputation as a Clevelandesque baserunner.

Actually, you look at that inning and you see one of the things that's hurt Lewis: not only the homers, but the fact that more than half of the hits he's allowed have been for extra bases. The league posts an almost unfathomable .784 SLG against Lewis at this point, and Buck line shot to Mark DeRosa at third was a radian or two from being ANOTHER double: with Francisco wandering around out there, that might have been two runs.

Still, this marks his second appearance in the series in which he threw shutout inning(s) and we won the game, so as with Reyes, I will take that every time. If Lewis can somehow figure

out how to keep the ball in the park, he could end up being that important back-end guy we thought he was going to be in the pre-season prediction threads.

### 3) Death to Any Things

Forget "flying" things: Kerry Wood has essentially prevented hitters from doing much of *anything* at the plate. With the same warnings about samples that applied to Lewis, Wood's overall numbers may not look good, but his 0.94 WHIP does, and he has 11 Ks in 5 1/3 innings. I mean that's just sick. More than 2 an inning. He struck out the side in each of his first two appearances, and two in each of his games in this series (for his 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> saves of the season).

Again, the two-run homer that made things Too Interesting on Tuesday was not good, but it didn't cost us the game, and it certainly doesn't mean that Wood has looked awfully dominant at times this season. I like having him at the end of our bullpen.

(Covelli Crisp managed to hit the ball ... all the way to ... Wood.)

## **4) March of the Gladiators**

Sometimes songs sound a lot different from their titles: a lot of people will think of "The Liberty Bell March" by John

Philip Sousa, the most American of American composers, as a British song because it is most frequently associated with being the opening theme to "Monty Python's Flying Circus." (Sousa's version did not end with a "splat," unless Elwood "Sticky" LeFrone, the lead trombone player, had been drinking too heavily before the performance.) So too it is with this song, which despite its grandiose title conjuring up images of tough warriors with swords and shields is most frequently associated with its use by Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey to signal the arrival of the clowns. Play it on a pipe organ for maximal effect: "Doo, doo, doo-doo-doo-doo doo, doo, doo, doo ..."

In the 4<sup>th</sup> inning, Jacobs lifted a ball that wasn't quite line drive and wasn't quite fly ball, but it was quite right to Ben Francisco, who grabbed a frying pan, held it firmly in his left hand, and deftly volleyed the ball straight down in an act of fielding defiance reminiscent of a Pete Incaviglia Highlight Reel. Not to be outdone an inning later, with runners at 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, Reyes fielded a comebacker, checked third, and threw to first.

Covelli Crisp took off at the throw to first, and Ryan Garko then unleashed the most terrifying, child-frightening, worthless water-pistol blorp of a throw to home that I've ever seen that didn't involve six-year-olds, T-ball, or a

poorly-pressurized shirt cannon. It was horrifying. Crisp not only scored, but Collapse-o took third on the play as well.

Finally, Trevor Crowe practiced enough time-honored Simple Butchery on a double to right that I found myself longing for Shin-Soo Choo's defense, which is kind of like saying a television show would be improved by a guest appearance by Dane Cook doing an impression of Vince, the Sham Wow Guy.

I have a theory about Garko as a

defender, which is mostly speculation on my part. I am not a scout. Maybe Tony Lastoria will chime in here. But Garko started his career as a catcher, and by all accounts wasn't good at it. He has had to learn first base with on-the-job training, and has made himself acceptable there.

But I don't think, the throw in the 5<sup>th</sup> notwithstanding, than Ryan Garko has a bad ARM. I think he can THROW just fine. He plays a credible right field by all accounts, and catchers, if nothing else, need to made a strong throw from the plate to second on occasion. No, I think that the reason that Garko was considered a bad catcher, and why he is

sometimes challenged at first, is that he has bad FEET. Garko's throw represented exactly none of the basic principles of weight shift management: I think Garko simply has bad FOOTWORK. Improving his footwork is what turned Victor Martinez from a much-maligned defensive catcher into a pretty good one (or at least average): Garko simply appears to have no intuitive feel for how to move his *feet*

. In this respect, outfield might end up being Garko's strongest position. (He's not a bad first baseman: he's sure better than Mike Jacobs. But he's never going to be Albert Pujols or Mark Teixeira, either.)

## 5) Marching on both sides of the aisle

It should be noted that Cleveland's first run was due to a comically-bad throwing error by John Buck, when Choo stole third (!) and Buck threw the ball to Not Third. In addition, although Francisco would likely have scored from third no matter what, Collapse-o truly bollixed a routine (if slow) ground ball by Asdrubal Cabrera on Cleveland's second run. I don't understand why 2 of Meche's 4 runs weren't unearned, as Cabrera scored later. Maybe they count

Choo's run as earned because Francisco hit a double later in the inning.

But KC didn't play appreciably better defense than we did ... and we were dismal.

## **6) Greedy Sizemore**

What did I just say? What did I JUST SAY? Get on base for Victor Martinez, not "hammer a

three-run shot to win the game, leaving poor Victor with the bases empty again.&quot; Geez.

## **7) Okay, that was facetious**

I love Grady Sizemore. Off ostensible left-handed matchup specialist Ron Mahay to boot.

## **8) Clutch Travis**

Travis Hafner was given the day off (day game after a night game), but he still made an appearance in the 8<sup>th</sup> inning, pinch-hitting for Trevor Crowe, who is approaching Least Favorite Player territory. Hafner lined a sharp single to right to get the tying run to third with one out and later scored on Sizemore's blast.

## **9) Terror on the basepaths!**

There is good terror and there is terrifying terror: Shin-Soo Choo's

audacious steal of third was mitigated by the fact that John Buck is a poor defensive catcher, but it was a gutsy call nonetheless and ended up scoring a run. That's good.

What is NOT good is to ignore your third-base coach's stop sign with NOBODY OUT while representing the TYING RUN in the EIGHTH INNING trying to score from SECOND BASE on a BUNT that the pitcher threw errantly to first when you are THIRTY-SIX YEARS

OLD. Yes, Collapse-o made a fine play to back up the base and gun down Tony Graffanino at the plate, but dude ... dude ...

DOOOOOOOOOOOOOD ... you are the TYING RUN in the EIGHTH INNING with NOBODY OUT. You cannot, cannot, CANNOT get thrown out there. Unless you can *wander*

home to score, DO NOT GO. You are a PUTZ.

## **10) The makings of a stressful summer**

Meche's start through 7 innings was actually brilliant: he gave up 2 hits, 0 walks, and struck out 7 guys in yielding one run on Choo's steal and Buck's X-Treme Bollix. I lobbied for the Indians to sign Meche on the grounds that he had greatly improved his K rate in his last season in Seattle, and I was looking for strikeout pitchers to mitigate what was at the time a pretty lame-assed defense at turning batted balls in play into outs. (My other target was Aaron Harang.)

To this point, Meche has 3 Quality Starts in 4 outings, posting a 2.63 ERA and a 1.02 WHIP. This is actually slightly lower than Zack Greinke's 1.05 WHIP, although he sports a ZERO POINT ZERO ERA with 2 Quality Starts in 3 outings while striking out 11.7 batters per 9 innings. Third starter Kyle Davies seems to have built on his September success and has 2 QS in 3 outings, sporting a spiffy 1.13 WHIP with a 2.89 ERA and 10.13 K/9.

Now, obvious, Sidney Ponson is a fungus, and Brian Bannister is Just Some Guy. Their bullpen still features Kyle Farnsworth and is run by a man in Trey Hillman who apparently has almost no idea how to run a bullpen. But Soria is an exceptional closer, and with those three guys at the top of the rotation, Kansas City is not going away any time soon. They may be no more than a .500 club, but this would be a huge step up for them, and with a few breaks, 81-81 becomes 88-74, and 88 wins might be enough to take the AL Central.

Put it this way: I am legitimately more worried about the Royals than I am the Tigers or White Sox.