

The B-List: 4-27

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, April 27 2009 7:00 PM -

For eight innings last night, we saw a classic pitcher's duel between the rejuvenated Cliff Lee and the improbably efficient Tim Wakefield. Then, in the ninth inning ... heartbreak. Kerry Wood relieved, gave up a bad walk to Dustin Pedroia, a bloop to Big Papi, and a three run game winning blast to Jason Bay. Buff relives the horror in today's B-List, and also calls for the end to the 13 man pitching staff and the promotion of either Matt LaPorta or Luis Valbuena.

FINAL

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

The B-List: 4-27

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, April 27 2009 7:00 PM -

R

H

E

Red Sox (13-6)

0

0

0

0

0

0

0

0

The B-List: 4-27

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, April 27 2009 7:00 PM -

3

3

3

0

Indians (7-13) (4.5 GB)

0

0

0

0

0

0

0

The B-List: 4-27

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, April 27 2009 7:00 PM -

0

1

1

4

1

W: Delcarmen (1-0)

L: K. Wood (0-1)

S: Putzelbon (5)



Brisk.

1) Welcome back!

"That was the Cy Young guy from last year."
-- Jason Bay

Whether Bay is truly an impartial observer or not is a matter of conjecture: Bay in fact had two of the five hits allowed by Lee, so it wasn't like he was trying to rationalize his own poor performance or was thoroughly throttled, but here are the facts: Cliff Lee gave up 5 hits (all singles) and zero walks in 8 complete scoreless innings. He struck out 5 hitters and threw nearly twice as many strikes as balls (70:36), a big improvement from the beginning of the season. He even pulled out the Vintage Curveball to record at least one of the strikeouts, but primarily made his living in the same manner as last year: with exceptional fastball command on both sides of the plate.

Consider this: Lee faced 28 hitters, and FOUR of them saw ball THREE. Now, it bears mentioning that three of these four hitters reached base on base hits, so going to ball three does not seem to be the recipe for success for Lee, but on the other hand, he didn't come particularly close to walking anyone, either.

In fact, it speaks well for his confidence that he was willing to throw strikes in 3-ball counts.

There really isn't a lot to say about Lee's outing that couldn't be cut and pasted from one of last year's columns: he threw a high percentage of strikes. He had exceptional command. He faced two hitters with a runner in scoring position, and ended each inning by retiring that batter (once by inducing a double play).

He recorded a much more pleasing 12:7 GO:FO ratio: Lee is never going to be confused with Aaron Laffey, but I feel more confident that he can sustain some success in this range than in the backwards zone.

He worked quickly and confidently, and his 8

th

inning was a 1-2-3 affair requiring only 7 pitches, only one of which missed the strike zone.

He even fielded his position well to retire the speedy Jacoby Ellsbury on an attempt to bunt his way on.

The B-List: 4-27

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, April 27 2009 7:00 PM -

This marks the third straight excellent start for Lee and the second time he has completed the 8th inning.

I'm a little confused as to why it was okay to send him out for an 8th inning with a pitch count in the low 100s but it wasn't okay to send him out for a 9th inning under the same circumstances, but I'll address that under a separate heading.

One thing that kind of blows is that this marks the third start in five in which the offense has produced 0 or 1 run(s) for Lee.

I'm gonna go out on a limb and predict Lee won't win 20 this season if the offense produces a half-run per game for him.

2) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.

I like Tim Wakefield.

I share Rob Neyer's irrational attachment to knuckleball pitchers. I even threw a knuckleball in Little League (although it didn't actually move: it was my straight change, because I could throw it as hard as I could and it simply would ... not ... go ... fast).

I liked both Niekroes.

I liked that Charlie Hough was an Original Marlin.

Tom Candiotti was my favorite Cleveland Indian for a time.

I rooted for Steve Sparks, fer crine out loud, a man who once went on the DL with a separated shoulder because he tried to tear a phone book in half.

I like the story of how Wakefield became a pitcher (he was originally a position player: I want to say shortstop). He was the one player I liked on the Pittsburgh Pirates (although I kinda liked Zane Smiff, even though he was genetically three-tenths chipmunk). I liked that he was temporarily an effective closer.

The B-List: 4-27

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, April 27 2009 7:00 PM -

I like that if you show film of him in 1992 and film of him in 2009, you can barely tell the difference.

I like that he has a perpetual contract that has become wildly imbalanced in favor of the club and doesn't complain about it.

I like how the talk comes up every season about he should be the odd man out in the rotation, he shrugs and says he'll pitch wherever they need him, and ends up making 25 good-quality starts anyway.

The fact is, history suggests that Wakefield's amazing start is completely unsustainable. He has a WHIP under 1.00 and an ERA under 2.00 with two complete games (1 a rain-shortened 7th innings) in four starts and carried a no-hitter into the 8th of his second start.

He goes through stretches like this, and he goes through stretches where he makes Shane Loux look like a FOR starter.

It's a knuckleball.

In any event, this was vintage Good Tim Wakefield: sure, he walked four guys, hit one, uncorked a wild pitch, and made poor George Kotteras chase down two passed balls, but such is the nature of the knuckler. The only hit off Wake came in the first off the bat of Victor Martinez: there were numerous scoring opportunities because of the walks and other shenanigans, but ultimately, the Indians couldn't cash in because Wakefield's knuckler was around the strike zone and thoroughly unhittable.

If we're going to get beaten by a superior performance by a Boston starter, I'll happily take Tim Wakefield as the guy who threw it. (I really dislike most of the rest of their staff.)

3) (expletive deleted)

Listen, giving up a three-run jack to Jason Bay is obviously bad. Kerry Wood missed badly with his location on the pitch, and Bay punished it.

The B-List: 4-27

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, April 27 2009 7:00 PM -

Sometimes the other guy is just good, and Bay is a very good hitter (.344 thus far, All-Star calibre in the past).

The thing that infuriates me more about the 9th inning Wood coughed up was the six-pitch walk to Dustin Pedroia. Wood threw two strikes to Pedroia, and Pedroia couldn't get around on either one of them, fouling each off.

Throw him strikes, and sure, something bad might happen (Pedroia's got some pop and is a fine hitter himself), but it sure didn't LOOK like he was going to do much with it.

But throw four balls, and Pedroia will take his base.

Walking the leadoff hitter in the 9th

inning of a tie game is bad enough, but it didn't look like Pedroia was capable of hurting Wood, which only compounds my frustration.

David Ortiz' hit was a bloop, and Wood actually got Kevin Youkilis (even hotter than Bay at .414 to this point) to fly out harmlessly. Mike Lowell tripled after Bay homered, so Wood may not have gotten away unscathed anyway.

You know, it comes down to this: I accept getting beaten by Jason Bay on a high-90s fastball that misses the mark. It's a bad pitch, but things like this happen. But to walk Pedroia there is just infuriating.

4) Silver Lining Dept.

I'm not sure how much anyone wants to harp on the offensive inadequacy last night: as I said, some times, the other guy is just good. Does it make sense to walk through a litany of o-fers against a guy whose stuff was exceptional? Probably not. In fact, I'll more congratulate Martinez for his ability to make solid contact against Wakefield than rail against everyone else's ability to do so.

Sure, we stranded a bunch of guys in scoring position (we left more on base, 8-6, and more in scoring position, 5-2, than Boston did, even on a night when we were 1-hit for 7 innings), but

The B-List: 4-27

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, April 27 2009 7:00 PM -

Wakefield was Super On and he beat us.

It happens.

I'll say this, though: I really liked that on a night in which it seemed a single run would mean the ballgame, the Indians took advantage of Wakefield's slow deliveries to take extra bases wherever they could find them: not only did three runners advance on pitches that bounced away from Kotteras, but Shin-Soo Choo and Grady Sizemore each stole their 4th base(s) of the season against Wakefield.

Asdrubal Cabrera even tried to bunt Sizemore to third, although he didn't make solid enough contact to be successful.

I can't fault them for getting overmatched, but it's worth crediting them for taking advantage of opportunities, as little as they ended up mattering.

5) Shapiro's Folly

The 13-man pitching staff must end.

Look, I understand the original principle: the starters weren't going deep enough into games, Carl Pavano was a 1-inning slug in his first start, Raffy Perez had bypassed "newt" and regressed all the way to "paramecium," and everyone in the bullpen was walking guys and giving up extra-base hits. A temporary 8-man bullpen still ground my teeth, but I could have made a credible debate team argument for it.

But its time has passed. Lee has tossed consecutive 8-inning starts. Laffey has back-to-back games in which he pitched in the 7th

.

Raffy Betancourt has righted himself, Vinnie Chulk had a fine outing last time out, Jen Lewis has solidified to a point, and Tony Sipp looks like a real major-leaguer.

I admit to being an advocate of the seemingly-radical 6-man pen (11-man staff), but great googly moogly, at LEAST go back to a SEVEN-man 'pen now, right?

The B-List: 4-27

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, April 27 2009 7:00 PM -

The reason I bring this up is that if you have 13 pitchers, you have 12 position players. If you have 12 position players, you have a 3-man bench.

And if you have a 3-man bench, this yields unfortunate side effects such as this:

In the 7th inning, Mark DeRosa advanced to second base with one out on a walk and a passed ball. Kelly Shoppach popped out, and Trevor Crowe was due up.

Remember, this is a 0-0 game at this point, and Lee still looked strong. To all appearances, this is a 1-0 game, first one to score wins.

So Eric Wedge called on Travis Hafner, hitting .288/.382/.576 on the young season: perhaps not truly PRONK, but looking a lot more like a legitimate DH at this point.

This is a fine move.

Crowe is a schmoe and Hafner only needs a single to score the "game-winning run."

Hafner did not, but that doesn't make the move idiotic or a failure.

He just made an out.

This is baseball.

Of course, Hafner can't play left field, so Ben Francisco trotted out to left to replace Crowe defensively. So, of the three-man bench, two of the players have been used.

This is okay, insofar as that's what it took and that's what was available: it made perfect sense for Hafner to hit and just as much sense for Francisco to grab a glove. But in the bottom of the 9th, against a struggling Jonathan Penisbon, Choo and Ryan Garko each singled, bringing the tying run to the plate with no outs.

Now, you might argue that Jhonny Peralta might have bunted there: he has been horrific for over a week and two runs would score on a single. On the other hand, Peralta has some power, we needed three runs, and Peralta is a preposterously bad bunter.

The B-List: 4-27

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, April 27 2009 7:00 PM -

He whiffed on three pitches.

This happens.

Mark DeRosa, bless his heart, actually came through with an RBI single to raise him back to the Mendoza Line. Tremendous! Way to go, Mark! And Shoppach followed, also a guy who could end the game with a swing, although he didn't.

Now Ben Francisco is at the plate. This is not the best matchup: yes, Francisco can hit fastballs, but more importantly, let me list the options:

a) Tony Graffanino

That's it. That's the whole bench. There is nobody else left. Tony Graffanino.

Francisco made an out, and that wasn't very good, but the fact is, against a struggling closer who gave up three hits and the bottom of the lineup facing him, we had to let the bottom of the lineup face him because there were NO OTHER OPTIONS. None. Graffanino isn't a bottom-of-the-lineup hitter, he is subterranean.

He is n'est plus putrid, a feeb, a ta-ra-ra-goon-de-ay.

Bring me the body of Matt LaPorta! Or Luis Valbuena! Or Teddy the Wonder Lizard! But for heaven's sake, get rid of a pitcher ... pronto.

(Not to be confused with Chad Paronto.)

6) Dept. of Raffies

The B-List: 4-27

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, April 27 2009 7:00 PM -

Raffy Betancourt was excellent in relief of Kerry Wood. That could come in handy at some point.

7) Managerial Head-Nodders

It's okay to send Lee out for an 8th inning at 106 pitches in 45-degree weather last time, but not okay to send him out for a 9th inning at 106 pitches on an 80-degree night? I'm not lookin' for any Big Answers, just some consistency.

Anyway, since I lobbied for him to be pulled last time, I can't get too uppity on him getting pulled this time.

It just seems like this outing was less stressful, and his previous inning was only 7 pitches.

I guess in a sense, he was sent out for the 8th at 99 pitches, which is completely analogous to being sent out for an 8th inning at 106.

This decision may have had more to do with the fact that the Big Right-Handed Bats were due up in the inning: after Pedroia and Ortiz, there was the Assaulter's Row of Youkilis, Bay, and Lowell. That's probably a group you'd rather see facing a righty, and Wood was a fine choice there. It just didn't work out.