

The B-List: 4/28

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Tuesday, April 28 2009 7:00 PM -

The Indians won a wild one last night at the Prog. 27 combined hits, 17 combined runs, and it took four hours and 19 minutes to play it. In today's B-List, Buff talks about the wild finish, he puts Anthony Reyes's poor start into perspective, and mentions that he is seeing signs that the bullpen is starting to stabilize. Buff also talks about Mark DeRosa's (much needed) huge night and discusses Eric Wedge's propensity for getting his players an opportunity to "undo" a previous game's failure.

FINAL

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9

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Red Sox (13-7)

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Indians (8-13) (3.5 GB)

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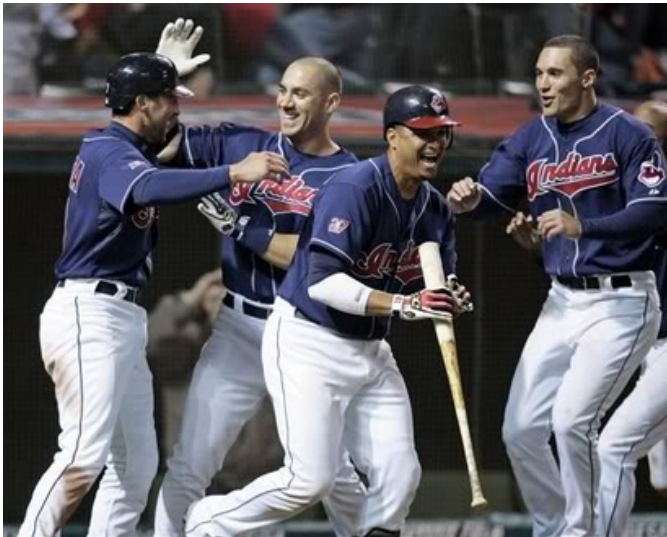
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13

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W: K. Wood (1-1)

L: J. Lopez (0-2)



Four hours and nineteen minutes is a loooong time for a baseball game, but considering this one was only a nine-inning affair ... well, that's just absurd. The first three innings took two hours!

1) Comedy High and Low at the Ballyard

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By now you already know that the winning run scored when relief pitcher Jose Lopez covered first base on a ground ball to first baseman Kevin Youkilis' right then plainly dropped the underhand toss. It was a good play by Youkilis, especially as a right-handed first baseman, and Lopez had easily beaten Asdrubal Cabrera to the bag: he just flat-out dropped the ball.

There is a part of me that wants to project the thought process onto Lopez that he was glancing down to make sure his foot touched the bag, and in that split-second, didn't squeeze his glove and the ball fell harmlessly to the ground.

There is a second part of me that wants to project a thought process along the lines of, "Mmm, peanut butter ... I hope they have peanut butter at the postgame spread.

I wonder why they call it 'butter,' though?

What would they call it in German?

I don't speak German.

Look, my shoes are tied!

Why can't you feel your own liver?

I wonder why Yook has hair on his face but not on his head.

Po is my favorite Teletubby.

Why would you ruin a perfectly good candy bar by putting coconut in it?

'Zeppelin' is a funny word.

I wish I'd bought Microsoft at 13.

Lemons are waterproof.

Hey, something hit me in the hand ... damn."

There is a third part of me that wants to say little besides, "Neener, neener, neener, neener, neener," and laugh maniacally at the stunned, slackjawed expression that Youkilis sported in the visitor's dugout after the game, looking oddly lobotomized.

Less memorable, but just as important (almost by definition in a 1-run game) were the previous examples of spectacular butchery that sprung forth from other Boston infielders: with men on first and second and no outs, Ben Francisco failed to get a bunt down, then grounded the 1-2 pitch to Mike Lowell. Lowell then casually flung the ball across the diamond to Not Kevin

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Youkilis, which was unfortunate for the BoSox, as Is Kevin Youkilis was the man standing on first base awaiting the throw. Francisco was safe, and the throw was so poor as to allow Jhonny Peralta, never the most attentive baserunner, to score from second.

Not to be outdone, Youkilis speared a potential inning-ending double play the next inning and threw to Julio Lugo, whose thought process mirrored that of Jose Lopez (in whichever incarnation you see fit to attribute to him): this time, Shin-Soo Choo scored from second, and, more importantly, Francisco belted a game-tying three-run shot immediately thereafter.

Now that I look at it, Youkilis was involved in all three plays, and each time had executed his role exactly properly. That expression, as unfortunate and addled as it was, is probably one I would have worn in the same role.

For the record, the Indians committed no errors and turned two double plays.

2) Less Tragedy than Pathos

I was prepared to go into a whole long riff about how Anthony Reyes' propensity for giving up the free pass and otherwise miss the strike zone was bound to catch up to him, but walks weren't the problem last night. Heck, he only walked one guy, although he did hit one, too. No, Reyes' problems were simple and droll: his pitches were flat and uninteresting, his velocity pedestrian, and his location execrable.

Reyes recorded a total of six outs, and nary a one came from a ground ball.

Of the nine hits he allowed, four were for extra bases.

Basically, he threw high and flat, and the Boston hitters pounded the living crap out of those pitches.

Reyes' problem wasn't with left-handers (Pedroia and Youkilis doubled from the right side) or right-handers (Ortiz and Varitek doubled from the left side), with good hitters or bad: he generally threw garbage, and everyone except Jacoby Ellsbury smacked him like a piñata.

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I'm not even worried much about the 7.58 ERA or the 1.68 WHIP: it was an atrocious outing that terribly skews his numbers. His first three starts were perfectly acceptable. But look: forget the outs, just look at the balls hit.

His GB:FB ratios have been 7:12, 7:12, 9:9, and now 1:13.

One!

(It was a single.)

I know he didn't give up any bombs this time, but he has given up 4, and if he isn't going to strike anyone out while allowing people to lift the ball over the infielders, well, there's just not much success to be had in that formula.

I still think Reyes can be a LAIM, an acronym I've seen for League-Average Innings Muncher. I t's one bad start out of three.

And 1 walk is good, but not at the expense of trading them for doubles.

I'd rather see Reyes pitch than Carl Pavano, but this isn't exactly comparing two positives.

Leave him alone for three more starts and ship him out if he doesn't pull it together.

3) The Bullpen of Death ... to Others!

Vinnie Chulk inherited a troubling situation. After yielding hits to the first three batters of the third inning, Reyes left the game with runners at 2nd and 3rd and nobody out.

Chulk came in and induced a pair of groundouts, the second of which allowed the runner on third to score ostensibly because Ryan Garko has not deigned to replace his flippers with arms capable of throwing to the plate.

Chulk did allow a single and a walk before recording the third out, but proceeded to face the minimum in the 4th

(another walk, but a double play) and recorded another out in the fifth before walking Julio Lugo, which is virtually impossible.

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Raffy Perez inherited this troubling situation, but after allowing a single, he got Dustin Pedroia to ground into a double play to end the fifth. He then threw a perfect sixth, including a swinging K from Kevin Youkilis.

Joe Smiff didn't inherit any trouble, so he created some of his own, walking Jason Bay after startin him off 2-2, then allowing Bay to advance on a groundout. A fly out and a single later, and Smiff had coughed up the lead to fall behind 8-7.

Tony Sipp inherited this troubling situation, but struck out Jacoby Ellsbury, then two more in the 8th after walking the leadoff hitter, finishing with 1 1/3 IP, 0 H, 0 R, and 3 Ks.

Kerry Wood got back on the proverbial horse, facing the previous night's nemesis in Bay and allowing a single. After a flyout and another single, Wood thoroughly overmatched Nick Green with three straight swings and misses, and induced a lineout to second to end the 9th

In all, the bullpen threw 7 complete innings, giving up 5 hits, 5 walks, 5 strikeouts, and 1 run. Three walks by Chulk is clearly not very good, and two hits by Wood is, strictly speaking, more than you want your Bullpen Ace to allow.

But in a game in which the bullpen was asked to go the extra mile (as well as some of Reyes'), it did exactly that.

After looking so dreadful early in the season, the bullpen has come up with some very solid performances in the past week or so: sure, Wood's bollixation Monday night was awful, but roles are starting to solidify. This marks back-to-back full-inning scoreless outings by Perez, who is starting to look a lot more like a legitimate reliever: he threw 10 strikes in 14 pitches, which is far removed from his multi-walk outings against KC and NY.

Sipp has become the de facto Raffy Perez of Old.

Chulk is a guy who can absorb early innings when the starter falters, rendering Zach Jackson largely moot.

Wood still closes.

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Smiff still looks like a matchup guy to me, but Raffy Betancourt has six scoreless outings in his last seven (albeit the 7th

outing was truly dreadful), and Jen Lewis has flashes of value (his two outings in the KC series were superb; his outing vs. Minnesota was not).

Masa Kobayashi has not so much solidified as ossified.

I am ready to go back to a 7-man 'pen. I may have mentioned this before.

4) Mighty Mark!

Mark DeRosa was mired in a 2-for-22 slump coming into the game, getting dropped from his customary #2 slot down to #8. This was prudent and served two purposes: it got him out of the 2 slot, and got the much hotter Asdrubal Cabrera up in the order.

This is the lineup that currently serves the Indians best.

This having been said, DeRosa had a superior night at the dish last night, going 4-for-5 and coming up a triple short of the cycle. Most crucially, after Smiff yakked up the go-ahead run, DeRosa got it back immediately with a solo shot off Toastashi Saito.

This helped allow the bullpen's heroics to avoid going to waste.

But just as important, on the Comical Butchery of Jose Lopez in the 9th, DeRosa scored from second base on the play, showing some attentive, heads-up baserunning there.

Sure, there were two outs and they weren't holding him on: in fact, Cabrera had a full count.

But he got a nice secondary lead on the pitch, and ran hard on the play, putting him in a position to score if the ball either got through the infield or got caught in the meandering thought processes of Jose Lopez.

Well done, sir.

(DeRosa, in fact, scored four times.)

5) Everybody hits!

Or, at least, everyone gets on base. Travis Hafner in fact did NOT get a hit (he walked once), although he hit a couple of balls pretty solidly. Still, there were a couple of 90+ fastballs that got right by him: again, Hafner is hitting .270/.370/.540, so he's been an asset, but it's unlikely that he'll ever re-attain his peak performances.

However, everyone else got at least one hit; Cabrera had two singles and a walk, while Francisco had a pair of hits.

6) Ben smash!

One of Francisco's hits, of course, came in the third when he drove a high inside fastball from Brad Penny into the pole in the left field corner. I'm not going to get all gushy about Francisco's ability to hammer a preposterously bad pitch: that is one pitch Ben Francisco hits with great authority, and I refuse to believe that Brad Penny was happy about where that pitch ended up.

In fact, it's hard to give a lot of credit to Cleveland hitters who hammered Penny, who has been simply awful to start the season: Penny's 7 hits, 3 walks, and 1 hit batsman equalled the number of baserunners Reyes allowed.

The fact that Penny was able to coax two more outs from the Indians than Reyes could get does not impress me much, as he required 13 more pitches and threw only two more strikes.

Anyway, Francisco didn't miss and deserves credit for that, especially on a 3-2 pitch and the fact that it was a 3-run jack that tied the game.

7) More Terror on the Basepaths!

And good terror, this time, as Francisco stole a base, as did Choo. These came in a tie game when the bullpens for both teams were doing a marvelous job of making the crowd forget about how thoroughly inept the starters had been.

Finally, DeRosa's winning run was good baserunning as well.

8) Back on the horse with ya!

The first batter in the 9th inning was Jason Bay, the man whose three-run homer the night before essentially won the game for Boston. Following him was Mike Lowell, whose triple off Kerry Wood ended Wood's night.

Eric Wedge called on Kerry Wood to face them.

I've talked in the past about one thing I admire about Wedge: his propensity for getting his players an opportunity to "undo" a previous game's failure. He didn't necessarily want this to be Bay and Lowell, and he almost certainly wasn't doing this solely for Wood's benefit (he was trying to win the game), but I like that Kerry Wood had failed to preserve a tie score in the 9th because he gave up extra-base hits to Bay and Lowell, and here he was, the very next night, washing that taste out of his mouth.

Wood wasn't really particularly successful: Bay singled, and Wood needed some stressful heroics to get out of the inning unscathed, but, to his credit, he did.

When this gambit fails, of course, it fails somewhat spectacularly: consider Fausto Carmona's stint as closer against these same Red Sox (in Fenway, however). But Wedge does this often enough that I have to consider it a pattern, and I think his players both appreciate it and respond to it.