

The B-List: 5/21

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Thursday, May 21 2009 7:00 PM -

Carl Freaking Pavano. As in Carl Freaking Pavano, #2 starter of the Cleveland Indians. Remove that atrocious first start, and Pavano has been pretty darn good. In today's B-List, Buff talks about Pavano's resurgence, the return of 2007 Rafael Betancourt, the remade Indians bullpen, and the red-hot Shin-Soo Choo's prowess at the plate. Three games this weekend in Cincitucky ... let's keep it rollin' Tribe!

FINAL

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5

6

7

8

9

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R

H

E

Indians (16-26)

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2

4

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0

8

16

2

Royals (21-20)

2

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1

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0

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0

0

3

7

1

W: Pavano (4-4)

L: H. Ramirez (0-2)

S: Betancourt (1)



1) Head-to-head comparison, or the Importance of Timing

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Admit it: you saw the matchup "Pavano v. Greinke" and wrote this off as a loss.

Later in the game, you saw two pitchers laboring and the game likely to be decided by the bullpens and wrote this off as a loss.

It's one thing to say that Carl Pavano "matched Zack Greinke pitch-for-pitch," but that isn't entirely true. Greinke made some pitches Pavano didn't, and Pavano gave up two extra-base hits that hurt him while Greinke gave up only singles. Still, consider these numbers:

Pavano	Greinke
6 IP	6 IP
6 H	8 H
1 BB	2 BB
8 K	8 K
3 ER	2 ER
101 pitches	103 pitches
65 strikes	63 strikes

Greinke gave up an extra walk, but Pavano hit a batter, which is essentially the same thing. Greinke gave up two more hits, but those 8 hits went for 8 total bases; Pavano's 6 hits went for 8 total bases.

Each pitcher allowed a stolen base, although Kelly Shoppach caught Mitch Maier trying to steal while Pavano was pitching.

I mean, really, the functional difference between these starts is virtually nil. The one thing that was striking about Greinke's outing was that he was able to come up with huge pitches while "in trouble":

- 1st: man on third, 1 out, K swinging, K swinging
- 2nd: man on third, 2 outs, 6-3
- 3rd: bases loaded, 1 out, K swinging, K swinging
- 4th: 1st and 2nd, 2 outs (both swinging Ks), K looking

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His 5th and 6th innings were actually quite clean, the only baserunner erased on a double play.

Greinke is still having the best season in the American League: his 0.82 ERA is still sick, and his stuff is obviously excellent. Some will say that the measure of a great pitcher is the ability to win without his best stuff, and Greinke DIDN'T have his best stuff (although he didn't win, he left with the lead).

Here's an interesting quote from Greinke:

"I just wasn't real crisp. It was really stupid pitching for that whole inning probably," Greinke said. "I started throwing two-seamers to get ground balls and it's not really how I pitch. I got behind on everyone because I was throwing the two-seamer. It was just stupid, really stupid."

In my house, we call that "perseverating." I'm not saying that Greinke is an Aspie with any great conviction, but I'm telling you, I've read a lot of articles about this guy and find myself nodding a lot. That's all I'm saying.

As far as Pavano goes, though, chew on this: Carl Pavano is our #2 starter. Argue against it. Go ahead.

Yes, his ERA is 6.10, but look: remove that first start, and it's 4.53.

His K:BB ratio stands at 40:11, which is quite good; without that first start, it's 39:8, which is actually excellent.

His K/9 is actually 7.55, the best of any starter (Cliff is at 6.53 and was at 6.85 last season).

Is he great?

No, he is not great.

Does he have four Quality Starts in his last five starts?

Yes, he does.

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I'm a bit torn here: I truly expected Pavano to be jettisoned before his performance bonuses kicked in: I figured we could get some cheap bulk innings from him and swap him out for Westbrook or Huff or someone and here's your fruit basket. Now, Pavano is our second-best starter, really by a huge margin.

We'll see how the summer goes, but at this point, I'm willing to pay him for this level of performance until it's obvious that one entity (Pavano or the Indians) is no longer worth investing in.

2) Fair is fair

My frustration with Luis Vizcaino's taterific Indians debut was set up by the raw suckage that had come before: hey, he gave up a home run to a good hitter, and although it was frustrating, the response was disproportionate.

Vizcaino's second outing for the Tribe was actually quite excellent: he struck out Mitch Maier swinging, showing some power stuff, then put Mike Aviles on board due to Luis Valbuena's first charged error of the season. After that, he threw nine pitches, and eight of them were strikes. He retired both hitters, ignoring Willie the Q's pinch-running steal for the superfluous gesture it was.

It's a little disconcerting that Vizcaino got 2 swings and misses while allowing 6 foul balls: you kind of want your late-inning power guy to miss more bats. On the other hand, none of the foul balls were particularly threatening, and he pumped 15 strikes in 19 pitches.

With a fuzzier picture, I could have mistaken him for Vintage Raffy Betancourt.

The home run in Tampa was bad, and Viz has been cast off a couple of times, but this is not an entirely unusual career path for relievers (Dan Wheeler, Kiko Calero, Russ Springer, etc.). If he can help solidify the 'pen and keep some of the mookier entities off the rubber, it'd go a long way toward preventing Cleveland from going all Washington Nationals on the AL.

3) Speaking of Vintage and Timing

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How awesome was it that 2007 Raffy Betancourt stepped out of the time machine, imprisoned 2009 Raffy Betancourt in the clubhouse equipment closet, slipped on his uniform, and trotted out to throw four pitches with the bases loaded and nobody out in the 9th? I can only hope this doesn't lead to Hitler coming back to life or mastodons suddenly appearing in Nova Scotia because the time-space continuum has been irrevocably altered, but it sure was cool.

Swinging strike
Foul out to 3B
Ball
6-4-3 DP

Ballgame! Thanks, Past Raffy, and say "hi" to Trot Nixon for me! Oh, and tell Tom Mastny to brush up on his Japanese.

4) Now is the time on "Sprockets" when we panic

Matt Herges has been one of those rare bottled-lightning retread finds that has really worked out to date: in 6 outings, he's given up two solo shots and little else, posting a 1.84 ERA and a 0.72 WHIP. Sure, it's a small sample (9 2/3 innings), but he's been a real breath of non-chlorinated air. One of the interesting things is that he's not being seen as a setup guy (hey, the guy used to CLOSE in San Francisco), but rather a multi-inning sponge, which is super-valuable for a team that features Anthony Reyes, Fausto Carmona, and Random Lefty hardly ever making it to even the 7th inning. (Actually, Pavano's kind of in this class as well, but he's pitching better than they are.)

Consider: while we wonder about a second inning for a Vizcaino or Betancourt after as many as 18 pitches in an inning, Herges has never thrown fewer than 22 and averages almost 28 per outing.

This almost bit the Tribe in this particular outing, as Herges followed a relatively uneventful 8th (one of four hitters reached on an error by Victor Martinez) with a horrorshow 9th in which, with a 5-run lead, Herges managed to walk two of the first three hitters (the other singled).

I mean ... dude ... you have a five-run lead!

Throw strikes!

It wasn't total blunderbussery: both hitters walked on full counts (the single was on a 3-2 count as well), and Willie the Q fouled off a pair of 3-2 pitches before walking. But ... dude ... throw strikes!

Anyway, I see Herges playing the sort of Julian Tavaréz first-guy-out kind of role, and hey, he's doing it pretty well. Right now he has no back-to-back appearances, which is unlikely given he throws 30 pitches an outing, but if he takes one night and Laffey the other, you can take a couple of Lee outings and bridge the gap to the back-end guys with minimal showings of Jen Lewis and the no-headed monster of Tony Sipp and Raffy Pérez.

(Apparently Pérez has regained his form in AAA. We shall see.)

5) Everybody hits!

Yes, everybody: whether you're tempted to say, "Even Luis Valbuena?" or "Even Grady Sizemore?" tells you something about your perception of the season, as well as your degree of snarkiness. But yes, each of the nine Cleveland hitters had a hit, and four players had multi-hit days, including Valbuena, who hit his third double on his young season. Yes, the Indians struck out 13 times, but Zack Greinke is very good, and Kyle Farnsworth ... okay, well, I can't explain striking out three times against Kyle Farnsworth, but I'm not all that concerned.

It is interesting to note that Valbuena either got a hit or struck out. Of the nine hitters, only Asdrubal Cabrera (4-for-5) and Grady Sizemore (1-for-1 with 2 BB and 2 sacrifices) did not whiff at least once.

6) Wait, what was that?

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Yes, I think it says something about Grady's season when he is asked to bunt twice after hits by leadoff hitter Cabrera. To his credit, he did it well. I'm not sure how many DHs get asked to lay down two bunts in a game, though. Somehow the images of David Ortiz or Travis Hafner doing this are hard to conjure.

7) Ducks on the pond!

Most of this is outlined in the description of Greinke's abilities to pitch out of trouble, but the Indians not only left 10 men on base, but EIGHT of them were in scoring position. No single culprit here, as seven different players made the final out of the inning with a runner in scoring position.

Now, think about this for a moment: seven players ended innings in this manner, meaning we left a runner in scoring position in SEVEN DIFFERENT INNINGS.

Hey, I'm all for an 8-3 win, and we had a couple of two-out RBI, too. We scored six runs in two innings against the bullpen: that's good.

But seven different innings leaving a man in SCORING POSITION?

Great Scott, that's suboptimal.

Note: this doesn't count the one-out plate appearances with runners in scoring position during which we did not score.

8) Bears mentioning

Shin-Soo Choo's last ten games: five multi-hit games, a .410 AVG, a .489 OBP, 11 R, and 12 RBI. He went 3-for-5 yesterday. I would say this was "hot," but I think it is better to simply say, "Choo is really Victor Martinez these past ten games."

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Victor Martinez went 2-for-5. Again. I would say he's "hot," but this seems like a tautology.

Mark DeRosa, Ben Francisco, and Kelly Shoppach each struck out twice, and I was pleasantly surprised. I think this says more about them than me.