

## The B-List: 6/2

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The Indians did just enough to lose a 1-run game in Minnesota, and Buff thinks there were plenty of indicators that it just wasn't their night. From the first-inning injury to Asdrubal Cabrera to the long fly out to end the game, little that could have gone right for the Indians did, and Buff writes about signs of improvement from David Huff and Tony Sipp, some perspective on just how hot Joe Mauer is, and thinks that Kelly Shoppach making contact with a baseball in four consecutive plate appearances deserves special mention. **FINAL** 1

<b>Indians (22-32)</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Twins (26-27)</b>	0	0	2	0

W: Slowey (8-1) L: Huff (0-2) S: Nathan (10)



### 1) Indications that this is not your night

After starting the game with a single on the game's first pitch, Asdrubal Cabrera separated his shoulder trying to break up a double play on Ben Francisco's grounder to second.

Cabrera, one of two Cleveland hitters to have an average over .300 this season, will be backed up by Luis Valbuena, Jamey Carroll, and a cardboard cutout of

Jack Brohammer. He is unlikely to go on the DL, because, you know, a shoulder is hardly ever used in baseball.

## **2) Indications that this is not your night**

Lefty David Huff was concerned about the speedy Denard Span being on first base, especially with Joe Mauer at the plate: Span had 11 stolen bases on the season, so before even throwing a pitch to Mauer, Huff tried to pick him off. And he did. Except that he didn't, because Victor Martinez air-mailed the through to Not Jhonny Peralta at Not Shortstop and Span made it all the way to third base. Where he subsequently scored on Mauer's guaranteed single.

## **3) Indications that this is not your night**

In the third inning, Kelly Shoppach smashed a ground ball for an apparent single, except that shortstop Brendan Harris made an excellent diving stop and threw Shoppach out. Harris also made a good play on Jamey Carroll's following Not Bloop Single. Finally, after a single by Francisco, Victor Martinez laced a Not Double Not Off the Baggie to right center, where Carlos Gomez' leaping catch ended the inning.

## **4) Indications that this is not your night**

After a one-out single by Span, I was begging David Huff to pitch around Joe Mauer, who is possibly the hottest hitter in the history of heat. Although he has only played 29 games due to a slow recovery from a kidney injury, Mauer already has 12 HR and 35 RBI along with 44 hits and 28 R in 102 AB, 20 BB, and only 15 K. The 12 HR would lead the Indians; the 35 RBI would place him second behind Victor Martinez' 38.

Here is some perspective on Mauer's season to date: Victor Martinez is worthy of an All-Star slot. He is hitting .351/.426/.566 and has 9 HR, 38 RBI, and 28 BB in 205 AB. Mauer has come close to matching these counting stats in roughly HALF the plate appearances. Martinez has one of the highest OBPs in the American League ... and **Mauer's AVG** is higher than **Martinez' OBP**. Mauer is hitting **.431/.516/.873** on the season, numbers that are unsustainable but really, really amazing.

Anyway, given a choice between throwing Joe Mauer a strike and consuming the baseball on the mound, I would ask for paprika and garlic salt.

David Huff did not throw a bad pitch: a low fastball that looked to have a little cutting action. It was probably a borderline strike, maybe a ball low.

It was a two-run homer. To the *opposite field*.

I would still have pitched around Joe Mauer more aggressively. Like, I would have rolled the ball.

## 5) A few words on David Huff

Well, the Quantum Coupling Theory has been disproven. This is why I bailed with a Bachelor's.

More seriously, though, Huff pitched pretty well except for a few mistakes: he was locating his pitches well and faced the minimum through 8 hitters, erasing the obvious Joe Mauer single on a double play in the first. Things went awry in the second, as he gave up a double to Alexi Casilla, which is very, very hard to do, then a single-single-double sequence to Span, Mauer, and Justin Morneau.

*(Did you realize that Justin Morneau is hitting .345 this season? I had no idea. He is still not as valuable as Joe Mauer.)*

After that, his only mistake was to throw a non-rolling pitch to Mauer. Although his overall stats weren't particularly good (5 IP, 9 H, 3 XBH, 4 ER), some of his peripherals were encouraging. He didn't walk any hitters, and threw 64 strikes in 98 pitches. He posted a much more healthy 7:3 GO:FO (9:9 GB:FB) ratio. And he struck out 5 hitters, 4 of them swinging.

This was a much more positive showing for Huff than his first two starts. His 4-inning start against Tampa was statistically better, but this spoke more to the sustainability of these stats. He seems to be doing a much better job of getting on top of his fastball, and each of the last two starts have posted neutral GB:FB ratios. One of the odd things thus far is how little his left-handedness seems to help things: left-handers are actually hitting him better than right-handers, and since right-handers are pounding him to the tune of a .963 OPS, this isn't a good thing. The samples are too tiny to draw much conclusion from this, but a better breaking pitch seems to be in order.

## 6) Encouraging signs

Tony Sipp marked his return from a brief trip to Columbus with 2 1/3 scoreless innings, giving up nary a hit and walking two, including Mauer intentionally. The intentional walk skews his strike-to-ball ratio below 1.0, as he threw 16 balls in 29 pitches, but with one strikeout and five ground ball outs, he was largely in control except for inexplicably walking Alexi Casilla on five pitches.

*Really. Guys. Alexi Casilla is a schmoe. He is hitting .168/.233/.211. Yes, he is 24 years old and may blossom, but the same could be said of Luis Valbuena. The other thing that could be said of each player is that they are currently completely incapable of hitting major league pitching. How can you give up a double AND a walk to Alexi Casilla? I mean, really now.*

Anyway, after walking Mauer, Sipp induced a double play, and struck out Jason Kubel looking for his final batter. If both Sipp and Raffy Perez emerge from their demotions with effective stuff, it could go a long way toward further solidifying the pen, and maybe even going back to a 12-man staff. (I have given up on the hopes of an 11-man staff.)

In addition, after having such a horrific blunderbussian last inning against the Yankees, Greg Aquino came out and threw 9 strikes in 14 pitches to collect the final two outs. This clearly fits the Wedgian Back-on-the-Horse Philosophy, and it worked (again) this time.

## 7) The Worst Approach in the World

With a runner on second and two outs, Ryan Garko was summoned to pinch-hit for Luis Valbuena. This was prudent, in that the pitcher on the mound at the time, Jose Mijares, is left-handed, and Luis Valbuena had little hope of producing a hit off a left-handed pitcher. Mijares is also completely spherical and even has fat on his *head*, but this is not entirely relevant. Also, Valbuena had used up his Weekly Hit Allowance in the 7<sup>th</sup> inning with a single off Slowey.

Minnesota's Ron Gardenhire responded by calling in Joe Nathan in the 8<sup>th</sup> inning, something that you are apparently allowed to do. Calling in your closer before the 9<sup>th</sup> inning may seem confusing to a fan of a Wedge-managed team, but I am telling you it is, in fact, a legal maneuver.

Garko took two pitches out of the strike zone, the second of which was so far out of the strike zone that it was, in fact, a wild pitch that advanced Mark DeRosa to third. At this point, I

mentally challenged Garko to look for a specific pitch in a specific location: if the pitch was not that pitch in that spot, take it. (I happened to say, &quot;Look for a fastball middle-in and up and hammer it over the wall, or take it.&quot;)

Garko got a pitch on the inside corner at the belt, which he inside-outed to second base for the inning-ending groundout.

Now, let us put aside for the moment what kind of contortions are necessary to hit a ball on your hands to second base. What did he hit it with, the knob? But if you are going to swing at the 2-0 pitch, immediately after a f&%^ing wild f&@^ing pitch, you'd better be swinging at something you can f&#^ing *drive*.

That does not describe Ryan Garko's approach to hitting Joe Nathan.

## **8) Indications that this is not your night**

With two outs, Jamey Carroll sinewed (I do not believe Carroll's puppy-like body has muscles) a single to center off Nathan, bringing Ben Francisco to the plate. Francisco was followed in the lineup by Victor Martinez, who had clubbed a solo shot in

the 8<sup>th</sup> inning to make it a one-run game.

Quickly getting down 0-2, Francisco showed remarkable patience by taking ball one. And ball two. And ball three! But then, on ball four, he attempted to muscle the ball out to left.

And this is exactly what he was: an out to left.

The writeup will tell you he hit a deep drive to the warning track. The video will show you that he simply flew out to left. If the pitch were three inches lower, he could have clubbed it out: up at chest level, that's a tough pitch to get around on.

And then we lost.

## **9) Near-heroic heroism**

With two outs in the 8<sup>th</sup>, Mark DeRosa smashed a ball to deep right center that nearly tied the game: instead, it was &quot;only&quot; a double. DeRosa then exhibited the kind of heady veteran baserunning play that can only be expected from heady veterans, taking third on the wild pitch by Nathan.

It is this kind of veteran headiness that could make the difference between an also-ran, like the .500 4<sup>th</sup>-place Chicago Cubs, and a playoff team, like the division-leading St. Louis Cardinals. Which team truly has the commitment to their fans necessary to pull the trigger on such a valuable player? We shall see. If I were a fan of one of these franchises, I would begin writing letters to my team's front office, or perhaps start a snarky column on a fan website. Whatever it takes. Do Chicago and St. Louis fans have this kind of passion?

Again, we shall see.

## **10) Blue Moon Special**

Kelly Shoppach hit a two-run  
&quot;double&quot; in the 7<sup>th</sup> to drive in two  
runs. With two outs!

And he struck out ZERO TIMES!

(The latter is what I meant in the heading.)

## **11) Schadenfreude Gedanken Experiment in Action**

If Jonathan Penisbon is facing the Detroit Tigers with the game on the line, do you root for a full-fledged alien robot attack, or a simple meteor strike?

It's difficult, I admit.