

## The B-List: 6/3

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}  
Wednesday, June 03 2009 7:00 PM -

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Finally ... some run support for Clifton Phifer Lee. The Tribe banged out 15 hits last night, romping to a 10-1 win over the Twinkies in the Metrodome. In today's B-List, Buff talks about Cliffie's 10th consecutive quality start, the Indians production with runners in scoring position, the return of Raffie Perez, and editions of Managerial and General Managerial Head Scratchers.

FINAL

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Indians (23-32)

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Twins (26-28)

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W: C. Lee (3-6)

L: Swarzak (1-2)



0) Public Service Announcement

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If you haven't checked it out, ESPN has a more-interesting format for their box scores, including all three &quot;slash stats&quot; for each hitter, a number of pitches each batter faced, and first-pitch strike and &quot;strike type&quot; stats for pitchers. It's pretty cool.

### 1) Ho Hum Dept.

Cliff Lee tossed his 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive quality start, yielding 7 singles and a walk in 8 complete innings, giving up one run and striking out 5. He needed 106 pitches, 71 of them strikes, and lowered his ERA back under the 3.00 mark.

This marks the fifth time in those 10 starts that Lee completed an 8<sup>th</sup>

inning of work, and the 5<sup>th</sup>

time in those 10 starts (not the same set) that he has given up no more than ONE run.

For perspective, Cliff Lee won the Cy Young last season, at least in part due to his tremendous start that thrust him into the national attention span: after 12 starts, he had a 2.52 ERA with 9 Quality Starts. After 12 starts this season, he has a 2.96 ERA and 10 Quality Starts. The reason he will not win the Cy Young this season is that after 12 starts last season he was 10-1: this season, he is 3-6.

But in terms of Lee's Actual Pitching Performance, the two seasons are not significantly different, although admittedly, he has had no starts this season that rivals his three-game stretch of last April, where he threw consecutive 8-inning 2-hitters and a 9-inning 3-hitter, giving up 1 run in the three games total.

One of the things that sticks out about Lee's performance is the high percentage of hits that are singles: last season, in 223 1/3 innings, he gave up 214 hits, but only 51 for extra bases. The league slugged .348 against Lee, and since they only hit .253 (.285 OBP), they didn't score many runs even when they got a few hits.

His average allowed this season is .292, which is actually a career high: even when he was getting bombed in 2007, the league only hit .284 off him.

The difference, then, is the KIND of hits teams are getting: of Lee's 95 hits (in 82 innings, a

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much poorer ratio than 2008), a paltry 19 of them are for extra bases. This adds up to a slugging percentage of .375, which is roughly Jamey Carroll.

At least part of this has to be attributed to the fact that Lee is no longer an extreme flyball pitcher as he was earlier in his career.

As a flyball pitcher, Lee gave up not just extra-base hits, but many of those were four-baggers:

2004: SLG .469, 0.168 HR/IP, 0.53 G/F  
2005: SLG .403, 0.109 HR/IP, 0.57 G/F  
2006: SLG .446, 0.145 HR/IP, 0.51 G/F  
2007: SLG .489, 0.175 HR/IP, 0.60 G/F  
2008: SLG .348, 0.054 HR/IP, 0.87 G/F  
2009: SLG .375, 0.049 HR/IP, 0.82 G/F

In a sense, the somewhat-fluky 18-5 2005 season, in which he posted a 3.79 ERA, might have been a bad thing to have happened to Lee in terms of long-term success. It made everyone think that he could survive as that kind of high-ball flyball pitcher.

In retrospect, everything about that season seems like extreme good fortune, from the .251 AVG (but only 6.37 K/9, so this smacks of luck) to the .403 SLG to the much lower HR rate.

The last two seasons, on the other hand, really speak to a sustainable state change, where the slugging is lower because the home runs are lower because the flyballs are lower because he has much better command.

If anything, Lee appears to be a bit high-UNlucky this season, making it that much more encouraging that the success of last year was not a fluke, but rather simply The New Cliff Lee.

Anyway, he throttled the Twins. Interestingly enough, his only 1-2-3 inning was the 8<sup>th</sup>: in 6 of the 8 innings, he yielded a single baserunner on either a single or a walk.

The 7<sup>th</sup>

was his run (HBP, single, DP, single), and the 8<sup>th</sup>

was a perfect waxing of the heart of Minnesota's order (St. Joe, Justin the Large, the desiccated husk of Joe Crede).

### 2) Everybody hits!

It wasn't just that every Cleveland player that came to the plate had a hit: five Indians had multiple hits, everyone but Kelly Shoppach scored, and the 9-through-5 hitters (wrapping around) averaged two RBI apiece.

Amazingly, only 1 Tribesman walked. Less-amazingly, it was Shin-Soo Choo, who has an OBP-AVG of .112 on the season.

### 3) Jholtin' Jhonny Redux

Probably the most amazing hit all night was when Jhonny Peralta took Twins' starter Anthony Sleestak deep with two men on and two outs in the third. Peralta has been living in the Tyner Zone all season long with an OBP greater than his SLG, so it was good to see Peralta flash a bit of power. This is only the second homer by Peralta this season after hitting at least 20 in three of the past four seasons: his SLG of .352 would be his lowest since becoming a regular in 2005.

He is actually on a decent-enough doubles pace, with 9 in 182 AB: if he gets his customary 575 AB, he would have 28 doubles, about the same as in 2006 and 2007 (although fewer than last year's career-high 42). It's the complete lack of homers that has been puzzling to date: Peralta's .351 OBP is actually his highest since his career gork year of 2005.

(He also has no triples, but with a career high of 4, this is not entirely significant.)

Anyway, more homers would be good, but getting a .269 AVG and .351 OBP from your shortstop isn't a bad place to start. Let's hope some of those singles start going for more than 1 base.

### 4) Duck Management

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When you have 15 hits, a walk, a trio of hit batsmen, and an error by the opposition, it's not surprising to leave 10 men on base. You can't drive everyone in: you just hope you can take advantage of a decent number of your opportunities.

So it was encouraging that the Indians:

- \*) hit .462 (6-for-13) with runners in scoring position
- \*) had 5 of the six hitters who came up with runners in scoring position get at least one hit in that situation
- \*) had the only player who DIDN'T get a hit in that situation collect a run-scoring sac fly
- \*) scored all 5 of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-inning runs with two outs
- \*) 7 of 10 of the runs were scored with two outs

Special mention goes to Victor Martinez, who collected both of his hits with runners in scoring position, driving in a run each time (going 2-for-3 in such cases).

Special mention also goes to the rest of the team for being in scoring position three of the times Victor Martinez came to the plate. For a guy hitting .352 and slugging .567, Victor should probably have more than 40 RBI. Last night, at least, was a job well done.

### 5) Managerial Head-Scratchers

I appreciate that Ben Francisco is hitting better lately. As we discussed earlier, his May stats of .295/.362/.484 are quite acceptable for a corner OF and pummel his .241/.333/.414 April with a sock filled with 4-oz. lead sinkers. Francisco is reasonably fast, and a pretty good baserunner (evidenced at least partially by his 9 steals in 10 attempts).

But leadoff? The .339 OBP guy (career .331) bats leadoff? I mean, that's better than we were using for the first six weeks when Grady Sizemore was putrid, but ... leadoff?

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The counter-argument here is that his May suggests Francisco is hitting more like a .360+ OBP guy, and that can play at leadoff. Francisco's career, however, suggests that of all the things that is likely to be "not like the others" in the Sesame Street sense, it is his May OBP.

I dunno. I mean, Jamey Carroll is clearly not REALLY a .423 OBP guy. We don't really have a true leadoff hitter on the roster with Sizemore and Asdrubal Cabrera on the DL.

But Ben Francisco at leadoff?

### 6) General Managerial Head-Scratchers

Josh Barfield?

Okay, listen: if you are conceiving of this player as being a guy who doesn't play, I am all for Josh Barfield being that guy. He can fill in at a number of spots and pinch-run for Ryan Garko and I don't care much about stunting his development. There is no "ment" to develop.

But two other possibilities suggest themselves:

a) Reward Andy Marte for his good showing in Columbus, slot him at third for a couple weeks, and see if he's turned the corner. The caveat here is that if Marte is on the roster, he would need to **play**.

b) Chalk up Matt LaPorta's bad start to it being his first real exposure to major-league pitching, slot him in left field every day, put DeRosa at third, and platoon Carroll and Valbuena at second (Carroll faces right-handers and left-handers, Valbuena faces pitchers whose last name starts with "X"). The caveat here is that if LaPorta is on the roster, he would need to **play**.

The subtext I read into calling up Josh Barfield is that the bold, italicized word is not, so to speak, in play. (Badump-bum!)

### 7) Continued continuation

Raffy Perez had a nice inning: sure, he walked the first guy on 4 pitches, but thereafter he threw 5 strikes in 7 pitches, inducing a double play and striking out the guy impersonating Delmon Young.

### 8) Shameless fawning

Mark DeRosa smashed a pair of singles off two different pitchers (Sleestak and the rebuilt chassis of Jesse Crain), each of them to the opposite field. This kind of bat control is rare from third basemen, usually thought of a dead pull hitters, and he used his above-average speed to make it to second on an infield single.

If I were a team like the Cincinnati Reds, reportedly looking for a third baseman, I would wonder: "Where could I find a player with veteran headiness, a guy who could hit behind the runner (because Dusty Baker loves that sort of thing), a guy with experience (because Dusty Baker loves that sort of thing), a guy who knows the NL Central like the back of his experienced veteran hand?" Because such players are rare, rarer than lightning strikes, and to find one before your rivals (St. Louis and Chicago each need this kind of player ... and these are two of the teams the Reds are directly competing against ...) do would be quite a coup. Such a move would signal to your fans a real commitment, and they would reward such a maneuver by buying more tickets, hot dogs, bobble heads, and parking spots, I'm sure.

It's an interesting question. Are the Reds really serious about competing in 2009? The acquisition of a player such as this would contribute real empirical evidence: failing to do so would make the team look that much more like the Pittsburgh Pirates.

I don't think anyone in Cincinnati wants that to happen. We shall see.

## **9) A committed approach**

Anthony Sleestak threw 12 of his 21 first pitches for strikes; knuckleballer R.A. Dickey was 4-for-8. And 15 of these 16 pitchers were taken by Cleveland hitters for strike one.

In fact, of the first 30 Cleveland hitters last night, exactly ONE of them swung at the first pitch, and it was Luis Valbuena, who doesn't know any better.

(This counts two men, Ryan Garko and Kelly Shoppach, who cleverly avoided swinging at Dickey knuckleballs that struck them.)

Plate discipline is not solely measured in walks: rather, it is a commitment to looking for a pitch/location combination in the early pitches and swinging only at that combination, ostensibly one the hitter can strike well. So although the Indians only walked once (and struck out 10 times, including three by Dickey), I still maintain that their 15 hits and 10 runs were the product of a disciplined approach at the plate.

## **10) Blue Moon Special**

Valbuena got a hit!

Okay, it was an infield single. It still counts! Huzzah!

## **11) Bonk!**

Shoppach was also struck by a pitch from Luis Ayala, giving the Indians 3 HBP on the evening.

Of course, the first two had the momentum of a well-thrown Wiffle Ball, so both Garko and Shoppach will likely be okay today.

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### 12) Nice hose, or Joe Mauer is not perfect

With one out and Joe Mauer inevitably on first, Justin Morneau hit a liner to center that Ben Francisco caught, then fired to first to double Mauer off. The part of that equation that surprises me is the identity of the baserunner.