

The B-List: 6/11

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Thursday, June 11 2009 7:00 PM -

Bugs, now birds. It's like the ten plagues of Cleveland. At least the wildlife is helping us win games. The Tribe pulled out yet another series win last night, coming from behind to edge the Royals 4-3 on a seagull-aided base hit in the bottom of the 10th inning from Shin-Soo Choo. In today's B-List, Buff offers up an excellent analysis of Jeremy Sowers. He fawns over Mark DeRosa for the 17th time in the last 19 B-Lists. And talks about the shocking effectiveness of Greg Aquino and Matt Herges.

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W: Herges (2-0)

L: Farnsworth (1-4)

*I want to fly like a seagull
To center field
Fly like a seagull
Let the ball come right to me
I want to fly like a seagull
To center field
Oh, whoa, home field advantage
-- Steve Miller, paraphrased*

1) The Rabbit

I used to want to be a middle distance runner when I was young, my hero being New Zealand's Peter Snell (from the encyclopedias we had). Of course, I did not call a mile "middle distance"; in those days, but rather just "distance."

I still enjoy watching track and field now and again, and one of the interesting features in the 1500m or mile races (not the same distance, but close) is the concept of a "rabbit," who is a guy the meet pays to set a faster pace for the first couple of laps than the real Serious Contenders might normally run.

Most truly excellent milers tend to stay within reach of the front guy then kick past him, so they hire a non-contender to force them to run a decent clip and maybe get close to a record, which is always more exciting for the crowd.

Normally, this guy will run laps in the sub-minute range and after two laps, peel off and die. Okay, well, he doesn't actually *die*, but he often doesn't even bother to finish the race.

He's not actually talented enough or conditioned enough to keep up that pace for four laps, so he doesn't.

Which brings us to Jeremy Sowers.

Consider this: Sowers had bad first innings in his first two starts, so his first-inning stats overall are bad. But look:

1st inning: .316/.364/.579
2nd inning: .158/.158/.158
3rd inning: .222/.300/.444
4th inning: .222/.333/.389
5th inning: .381/.409/.667
6th inning: .417/.632/.500

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And the 5th and 6th innings are helped by his scoreless relief outing!

How does he do with repeat showings: does familiarity breed contempt?

1st time: .224/.278/.327, 1.0 K:BB
2nd time: .235/.278/.412, 2.33 K:BB
3rd time: .471/.640/.824 (!!!!!!!), 0.5 K:BB

Pitch count?

1-25: .273/.324/.424, 1.0 K:BB
26-50: .186/.205/.349, 2.0 K:BB
51-75: .300/.417/.433, 1.33 K:BB
76-100: .455/.625/.818, 0.40 K:BB

Remember the "Sowers Checklist"?

Low K rates
High BB rates due to nibbling
A tendency toward fly balls
The fly ball tendency leads to homers
An inability to miss bats (contributes to low K rates)

Well, he didn't strike out a lot of guys or miss a lot of bats, but when he REALLY NEEDED ONE, he got it ... twice. In the 4th, with the bases loaded and 1 out, where a fly ball or slow grounder scores a run, he struck out Miguel Olivo swinging on three pitches.

And in the 5th

, even though he gave up two runs, with a

runner on third and 1 out, Sowers struck out Jose Guillen swinging, with two of the strikes

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swings-and-misses.

So although you'd like more Ks, I'm not going to get on his case there.

And part of the reason was because of his ground ball rate: Sowers posted a sterling 10:3 GO:FO ratio, including 8 of his first 9 outs (and one man reached on an error on a ground ball).

Consider this:

Ground balls: .200/.200/.200
Fly balls: .267/.261/.667
Line drives: .667/.667/.800

Now, this sort of distribution is hardly unique to Sowers: it's the entire point of liking ground ball pitchers. Line drives OFTEN turn into hits, that's sort of their point. A problem is that a goodly number of Sowers' fly balls land over the fence, but he didn't give up any homers here.

But we probably have to add something to the Checklist: namely, "Third Pass Through Order Disastrous."

Sowers was excellent at getting ground ball contact, and through three innings he was awesome. In the 4th inning, not so much (2 H, 1 BB, 0 R). In the 5th inning, ptui.

There are two ways to handle this: try to be more efficient in the early innings to make the third pass through the lineup come as late as possible, or maybe employ a third average-plus pitch.

2) Consarn it!

Tony Pena got another hit! How do you give up a hit to Tony Pena?! He has three hits ... and two are off Cleveland pitching this series!

He has an OPS of 0.715 in Jacobs Field ... and 0.196 everywhere else!

0.196

OPS

!

(.053/.143/.053)

(Yeah, these sample sizes and tiny, tiny, tiny. But Tony Pena might be the worst non-pitcher hitter in the 21st century, and he got two hits in the last two games. Argh!)

3) Never hoist a good story on the pitard of truth

Yes, yes, it is funny to say that the Royals lost because Shin-Soo Choo's single to center clipped a seagull's wing.

But let's be serious for a moment: Mark DeRosa has average speed and was rounding third. C oveli Crisp has the arm strength of a pound of lard.

DeRosa was going to score if the seagulls all got together and guided the ball into Crisp's throwing hand.

A strong-armed CF would probably not have gotten DeRosa, and Crisp certainly was not going to.

This having been said, I think it's time to question the groundskeeping staff's decision to seed the outfield turf with Purina Seagull Chow. Failing this, we may need to look to [Tom Lehrer](#) for advice.

4) A wonderful lack of smallball

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When Mark DeRosa led off the 10th with a single with the score tied, I was terrified that Eric Wedge would have Victor Martinez bunt. You don't have Victor Martinez bunt.

Victor Martinez has over a 40% chance of not being out.

Sure, there's a DP risk, but Martinez is your best hitter.

Not only this, but a sacrifice would likely result in the lefty Shin-Soo Choo being walked to have the righty Jhonny Peralta face Kyle Farnsworth.

After Martinez walked, I was even *more* terrified that they would ask Shin-Soo Choo to bunt. In fact, he was expecting this as well.

Fortunately, sanity reigned, and the guy with the .400+ OBP was allowed to hit.

He won the game.

5) Lest you think I am an iconoclast

In contrast, I totally applaud the use of the bunt in the 7th inning, down a run, after a leadoff single. It didn't actually WORK, but it was a fine strategic play.

6) Pwnage

Ryan Garko may be having his problems this season, but getting a hit off Zack Greinke is not one of them. Garko went 2-for-3 off the Royals' Ace before being lifted for a pinch-runner in the 7th.

But if you want to talk about a man owning an entire TEAM'S worth of pitching, you have to look at the indefatigable Mark DeRosa, who reached base ALL FIVE TIMES he came to the plate. D

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eRosa saw 27 pitches in those 5 plate appearances, walking twice and cranking out three singles out of the 2 slot.

The team originally wanted DeRosa to hit in the 2 slot the whole time, but his early struggles forced him down the lineup. Now that he has his legs back on his new team, DeRosa is hitting .274/.345/.452 on the season, including a 12-for-35 string in his past 9 games with 4 extra-base hits.

It will be interesting to see how the Cardinals react this weekend as they look longingly into the opposing dugout and see the man who ought to be playing third base for them, were it not for the hesitant, mealy-mouthed management who has thus far proven unwilling to do what it takes to separate the Cardinals from the rest of the N.L. Central. I would fear, as a Cards fan, that the time to make hay is now, and that such indecision would cost me greatly in the future ...

7) Let's hear it for fungibility!

Greg Aquino coughed up a homer to Miguel Olivo, but in three complete innings in relief of Sowers, Aquino struck out 4, walked only 1 (which has been a problem for Aquino), gave up one other hit (a single), and helped pass a tie game to Kerry Wood. Aquino still has a backwards K:BB ratio and a highish WHIP because of it, but his ERA is 3.21, and in 8 games with the Tribe, has only given up a run in two of them.

In addition, six of the eight outings were for more than an inning, including five of at least 2 complete innings.

He hasn't been just an innings sponge, but a good one to boot.

And then there's Matt Herges: 1.02 ERA, 0.68 WHIP, last 8 outings scoreless with a maximum of 1 hit allowed, and now 2-0 on the season. I would not only have not bet on this, I would have bet against it, then put on a wig and glasses and bet against it again.

8) Well, he was good, too

Kerry Wood struck out 2 guys in a perfect inning. He is not fungible.

9) A Game of Inches

If you think about it, we won this game because we started a rally off Zack Greinke and finished it off against Joakim Soria. That's pretty awesome, Soria's missing superhumanity notwithstanding.

The pitch that Jhonny Peralta clubbed for the game-tying double was an execrable pitch. Truly awful.

A hanging curveball to end all hanging curveballs.

But you still have to hit it, and Jhonny did.

I couldn't tell exactly where the ball hit, but it couldn't have been more than a few feet below the top of the wall, meaning it would have won the game in regulation.

Alas.

But, of course, the Tribe wouldn't have been in a position to even tie the game had it not been for the fantabulous Kansas City Defense: Billy Butlet atoned for his butchery of the night before, taking a potential 3-6-3 grounder and threw it directly to second in time to get Victor Martinez. (How fast does a ball have to travel to "beat Victor Martinez"?)

This sounds like a Zeno problem.)

Then Tony Pena, apparently still giddy from getting a hit earlier in the game, threw the ball as close to Billy Butler's glove and Butler had thrown the ball the previous night, which is to say, not close at all.

The throw was putrid, and Alberto Callaspo, backing up the play, compounded the problem with an errant throw home of his own.

Anyway, instead of three outs and no runs, the situation became two outs and one run, which set the stage for Peralta's quasi-heroics.

10) Paying attention for fun and profit

Ben Francisco seems like a bad choice to hit leadoff for this lineup. His OBP of .317 is pretty bad, and he's only hitting .249 if you like that sort of thing.

I know we don't have a lot of options, though: if you don't want Adorable J. in the lineup, your other choices boil down to Choo (good OBP, wasted SLG), Valbuena (very bad OBP), and Crowe (very VERY bad OBP).

But this is nothing compared to the decision made by Tony Muser ... er ... Trey Hillman to use David DeJesus as leadoff for the Royals.

David DeJesus has a .289 OBP.

David DeJesus hits .188/.205/.275 against left-handed pitching.

Covelli Crisp has an OBP of .340, .325 against lefties.

.325 is greater than .205.

And if not Crisp, why not ... er ... anyone else besides Tony Pena?

(Of course, DeJesus went 2-for-5, proving that numbers aren't everything, but playing the percentages still seems worthwhile.)

By the way, at one point last night, the DHs were Brayan Pena (hitting .211 with a .238 OBP) and Adorable J. Carroll, who slugs .397 in the Tyner Zone. Luis Hernandez was called on the pinch-hit with his .200 AVG and .259 OBP ... which was really the right move because the

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player he replaced is hitting .115.