

## The B-List: 7/21

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}  
Tuesday, July 21 2009 7:00 PM -

---

Cliff Lee's wonderful performance last night was marred by the fact that he did it for the Cleveland Indians, who tried very, very, very, very, very hard to lose the game out from under him, squandering golden opportunities in each of the first four innings before finally taking advantage of two of the most unlikely things in all of baseball. Buff touches on Lee's performance, the advanced nature of the squandering, and lauds the bullpen for their excellent lack of work. **FINAL**

	1	2	3	
<b>Indians (37-57)</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Blue Jays (46-48)</b>	0	0	0	0

W: C. Lee (6-9) L: Downs (1-1)

Does it count as an exciting finish when you need an unearned run to win a game you should have won about 6-1?

### 1) Ho Hum Dept.

Cliff Lee pitched a complete game in 112 pitches, throwing 84 pitches for strikes, walking no one, and giving up a single run on a solo homer. This contrasts strongly with his previous start, in which he threw a complete game in 112 pitches, 82 for strikes, walking no one, and gave up a single run on a solo homer. Giving up a solo shot to Scott Rolen seems a little more aesthetic than yielding one to Ronny Cedeno, but this is more a matter of taste than anything else.

In fact, each game featured exactly two doubles as well: they were essentially the same outing. Lee now has a 3.17 ERA on the season, meaning that by some measures he is actually pitching better than C.C. Sabathia did when he won the Cy Young in 2007. Of course, he is not pitching quite as well as Kevin Millwood did in 2005, when Millwood posted a 2.86 ERA and a 1.22 WHIP in 30 starts.

In some ways, Lee's 2009 is very similar to Millwood's 2005: his ERA is much better than any other starter (Millwood's was just short of a full run better than Lee), and he has a losing record to show for it (6-9 for Lee, 9-10 for Millwood).

Lee has a higher Quality Start percentage, with an astonishing 17 in 21 starts, while Millwood had a more-pedestrian 20 in 30. Lee's WHIP fo 1.32 is a bit higher, but it certainly isn't because of free passes: with another walkless game, Lee still sits at 33 walks in 21 games, or just over 2 per 9 IP.

One of the most impressive things about Lee's outing last night was that the two doubles he yielded were leadoff shots ... and then none of the next three batters in either inning advanced the runner even one foot. And the Jays went 0-for-6 with runners in scoring position, meaning that ... those two guys were the guys in scoring position. No one else even reached second base (with the obvious exception of Rolen's homer).

Now, it bears mentioning that neither Seattle nor Toronto is a particularly good offensive team. The Mariners were held to three runs by each of David Huff, Tomo Ohka, and Aaron Laffey, two of whom got Quality Starts out of the bargain. Toronto is sort of a middle-of-the-pack offense with 448 runs scored, which is actually fewer than Cleveland. But the fact remains: Cliff Lee is one of the best pitchers in the American League, and is poised to post the best back-to-back ERAs since ... well, I have no idea. Better than Bart Colon. Better than Sabathia's 3.22 and 3.21 in 2006-2007. You're probably talking about Bert Blyleven in 1984-1985, posting a 2.87 and 3.26 in consecutive season and a much different offensive era.

Anyway, I was really glad to see Cliff come out for the 9<sup>th</sup> to finish the game. Because I like when the Cleveland Indians win. And there is no Cleveland pitcher besides Cliff Lee that I trust to throw a scoreless inning.

## 2) Expert Level Squander Ball

It is one thing to play a little Squander Ball now and then. Heck, the Blue Jays sort of did this in the third and fourth with the leadoff doubles.

We like to attribute this to the skill of Cliff Lee, and objectively, we're probably right, but surely Toronto fans were lamenting their lack of clutch hitting there.

But there's a difference between lacking "some clutch hitting" and lacking "any semblance of offensive competence."

In the first inning, Asdrubal Cabrera laced a one-out triple. Not a double, a *triple*. He was on *third base*. Now, consider what it takes to score a man from third base with one out. You can hit a feeble ground ball. You can hit a decent fly ball. You can hit a grounder that forces an infielder to range more than five feet. You can get an actual, bona fide base hit. But that's overkill: the point is, you don't even have to hit the ball WELL to score that run.

You do, however, have to hit the ball.

Which Shin-Soo Choo did not.

With two outs, Victor Martinez was hit by a pitch. To score the run from third with two outs, you actually have to get a hit. Even just **putting the ball in play** allows the possibility of a run on a bad defensive play (although Toronto has one of the best defenses out there).

Which Travis Hafner did not.

So in the second, a one-out double by Fungus McFungus was followed by a single to right center. Why McFungus did not score on this ball is a matter of conjecture, but the same laws apply to the next hitter: hit the ball, score a run.

Which Kelly Shoppach did not.

With two outs, Grady Sizemore did put the ball in play. It didn't work.

In the THIRD, a one-out single by Choo was followed by a walk by Martinez. Hafner whiffed. Then Jhonny Peralta walked to load the bases ... for Fungusco to strike out looking.

In the FOURTH inning, Jamey Carroll walked and advanced on a groundout. See? Guys? All it takes is a bloody OUT. It doesn't require some great masterful piece of hitting. It simply takes an adequate piece of FAILURE. You don't even have to be GOOD. You just have to NOT SUCK.

Grady Sizemore walked. Huzzah!

Asdrubal Cabrera singled. Huzzah! Jamey Carroll stopped at third.

## The opposite of huzzah!

And then ... with one out ... requiring only Ordinary Failure rather than Abject Failure ... Choo grounded into a double play to end the inning.

At this point, Cliff Lee is now sitting in the dugout, chewing through chips of Kevlar and punching koalas. Victor Martinez is trying to calm him down by allowing Lee to whack him with a fungo bat while protected with three layers of catching gear. And Eric Wedge is feverishly trying to grow lips.

None of these things are successful. Much like the Cleveland offense.

### **3) Wonder Doofus Powers, activate!**

*Shape of ... Tony Pena Jr. ☐*  
*Strength of ... milquetoast!*

The next eight Indians made feeble outs, including three whiffs.

### **4) Return of the Squander**

With two outs in the 7<sup>th</sup>, Choo beat out an infield single, and Martinez whacked a double to left.

Travis Hafner grounded out on the FIRST PITCH.

## **5) Return of the Doofus Powers**

*Shape of ... John McDonald's rookie year!☐*

*Power of ... a potato battery!*

Of the three batters in the 8<sup>th</sup> inning, zero of them hit the ball out of the infield.

## **6) Dept. of the Unlikely**

The Indians won the game because of two things:

a) Ryan Garko beat out an infield single.

b) Lyle Overbay threw a bunt into left field.

The Blue Jays have the lowest number of errors in the American League, so this is very unlikely to have happened. But really, is there a Cleveland fan alive who didn't find the first of these events to be the far more unlikely?

## **7) Around the bullpen**

This was the finest performance by the Cleveland bullpen in 2009.

## **8) Trade Proposal**

Kelly Shoppach for Chris Davis. Who would notice first?