

The Indians win another series from a Division rival, this time taking two of three from Minnesota, as Fausto Carmona outdueled Nick Blackburn thanks to so clutch hitting from an unlikely source and a whole lot of UN-clutch hitting from every OTHER source. Today's B-List touches on a Tale of Two Faustos, an odd sense of calm from the bullpen, and waves "Good Bye" to Carl Pavano as he wafts into the Minnesota sunset. **FINAL** 1

Twins (53-55)	0	0	0	1
Indians (46-62)	0	0	0	1

W: Sipp (2-0) L: Blackburn (8-6) S: K. Wood (15)

How can your business model not have room for Hal McCoy? That's like manufacturing keyboards and deciding to leave off all the vowels.

1) A Tale of Two Pitchers

Consider two games pitched by Fausto Carmona yesterday.

In the first game, consisting of seven batters and 1 (plus) inning(s), Carmona was a mess. He couldn't find his buttocks with both hands, which is quite a feat given the size of his buttocks. Not only did he walk the leadoff man on four pitches, he walked three of the seven men he faced and had three balls on five of them. He started four batters off with 2-0 counts, threw first-pitch strikes to two hitters, gave up a double, and threw more balls (18) than strikes (14). He allowed more baserunners (4) than he recorded outs (3). This is an execrable performance, and indicative of why Carmona was sent all the way back to the Instructional League. It's a minor miracle that this pitcher didn't give up at least two runs.

In the second game, consisting of 20 batters over five complete innings, beginning with runners on second and third and no outs, Carmona threw 44 strikes in 65 pitches, including 10 of 20 first-pitch strikes. The first-pitch strikes aren't very good, but 44:21 is a very good strike-to-ball ratio. He gave up five hits and one run, but as important as anything else, he didn't walk ANY batters while striking

out two. 65 pitches for 5 innings is pretty efficient, suggesting a pitcher who can get deep into a ballgame (at least into the 7th, if not the 8th). He went 2-0 on two hitters (both Jason Kubel) and only reached a three-ball count twice ... both times in his final inning of work.

Obviously, you don't get to split a game up like this and draw great, meaty conclusions from it, but I don't think it's unreasonable to take some encouragement from the fact that Carmona was able to right himself after such a poor start. Now, it bears mentioning that the one run he gave up was not only in the "good" section of his outing, but came on a wild pitch. You can cut the data any way you see fit, but you can't remove all vestiges of Fausto Carmona from a Fausto Carmona outing. But the point is, the general impression you might get from the stats is that Carmona generally struggled, when the truth is that you really can draw a pretty thick dividing line between the time when he looked completely ridiculous and the time when he looked like a quality starting pitcher.

I guess the reason I'm especially interested in this is that the Indians have had a lot of performances that go in sort of the opposite order, in which a pitcher starts off well then seems to disintegrate, and in very few of those outings does the pitcher "re-integrate" (in the parlance of Duck Dodgers in the 24th-and-a-half century). This outing was fundamentally different from those: Carmona had every opportunity to simply lose his composure and get bombed out of the game before even Tomo Ohka could get warm. Instead, in a stressful situation (two men in scoring position, nobody out), Carmona began firing strikes and ended up throwing a fine game. It was also encouraging to see a brisk 12:4 GO:FO ratio, a calling card of successful Carmona outings in the past.

Now let's face it: the Absolute Dependable Confidence Level in Fausto Carmona is measured with large negative exponents at this point. He could still blow up, he could still wander around the Blassian Desert in Moses-like fashion for the next forty years. Not many things would completely surprise me about Fausto at this point. But in a game in which you see good signs and bad signs, this game had much more good than bad.

2) A strange calm

I had a very odd feeling yesterday, in which after Fausto Carmona left the game, I felt confident.

Given the performance of our bullpen to date, this feeling did not seem to emanate from anywhere rational, but I felt it nonetheless.

But Tony Sipp fired first-pitch strikes to each hitter he faced in a perfect 7th, collecting a strikeout, and he retired both Joe Mauer to end the 7th and Justin Morneau to begin the 8th before yielding his first hit with one out in the 8th

. Then Joe Smiff came in to face the right-handed hitters Mike Cuddyer and Joe Crede, getting one forceout and a swinging

strikeout on a very nasty pitch that reminded me of vintage Jeff Nelson. Finally, Kerry Wood collected his 15

th

save with a perfect 9

th

, getting a K and two harmless groundouts.

The numbers don't necessarily justify my sanguinity at the time, but I wanted to voice my feeling: it FELT like the Indians' bullpen was in CONTROL of that game. I'm more reporting it than trying to justify it. The bullpen still has pretty bad numbers, and the sample is large enough that some good outings won't change 'em much.

Consider this, though: go into next season with:

Jess Todd

Joe Smiff

Tony Sipp

Raffy Perez

Chris Perez

Kerry Wood

One More Guy (Alex White? Steven Wright? S.

Lewis/Sowers/Huff? Rondon?)

I mean, you can win with that bullpen. If you can unload Wood on a team that would make more use of him, you could slot Todd or C. Perez in at closer, although you'd need another arm. Or maybe even use a sane 11-man staff instead of a painful 12-man staff. But you could win with that 'pen.

3) A more radical approach

I had a discussion via email with reader Richard Sheir about the bullpen and made the following suggestion: instead of defining the pitching staff in terms of hard-and-fast traditional roles, could this collection of pitchers be more-suited for a more-fluid approach?

Consider: to this point, the Indians have employed the 21st

-century orthodoxy of five starters, then one long guy, two middle guys, short guy, LH setup, RH setup, closer. If

you tell me that Reliever X pitched last night, I could correctly guess the inning and length of his outing over 60% of the time. This can be a fine thing when the pitchers line up in this way: 2007 was a great performance by the bullpen, although a lot of that had to do with the fact that both Raffies were nigh-unhittable and Joe Borowski was the third-luckiest man in the U.S. behind Dane Cook and a lottery winner.

I have no objection to having a bullpen set up this way. If you have the pitchers, there are many occasions in which the entire staff will pitch better with more confidence because each pitcher is slotted into his natural "comfort slot" and everyone gains strength from the collective. That's great. But if you try to force a collection of flawed pieces to hold together in a predetermined way, this could cause more stress and cracking than trying to adjust differently.

Right now, we have three guys I'd be happy to send out to the mound every fifth day: Westbrook,

Carmona, and Laffey. No, I'm not saying these are all sure things. Westbrook hasn't pitched this season, Carmona is no more dependable than a paper dam, and Laffey has flashes of brilliance surrounded by a sea of average. But you have to have someone in the rotation, and these three guys are the ones I am MOST willing to write down on paper.

Then we have an exceptionally large collection of major-league-quality arms who don't actually perform well in the classical role of starting pitcher. David Huff has stuff without results. Jeremy Sowers is notorious for bursting into flames his second or third time through the order or some time in the 5th or 6th

inning. Scott Lewis is made of glass. Justin Masterson has been relieving for a while and has a humongous platoon split. Minor-leaguers are not ready.

And then we have some more classical relievers with plus stuff: Todd, Sipp, Perez x 2, Smiff in a matchup role.

So build that staff, not with a fixed rotation, but rather with roles:

7-inning guys: Westbrook, Carmona, Laffey

3-4-inning guys: Huff, Sowers, S. Lewis,
Masterson

1-inning guys: Todd, Sipp, C. Perez, R. Perez,
Smiff

Unload Wood on anyone who either gives you a good prospect (because you pay the majority of Wood's salary) or salary relief. Convert Jensen Lewis into a knuckleball pitcher, or possibly a goatherd. Maybe I'm wrong about J. Lewis and

he takes Raffy Perez' place. Who knows?

But you could mix, match, and ride hot hands with that staff. For example, you could set your initial plan like this:

Game 1: Westbrook (R. Perez, Smiff, Todd)

Game 2: Huff, S. Lewis (C. Perez, Sipp)

Game 3: Carmona (Todd, C. Perez, Sipp)

Game 4: Sowers, Masterson (R. Perez, Smiff)

Game 5: Laffey (Smiff, Todd, Sipp)

Maybe you wouldn't need every pitcher every game. (Heck, I sure hope not: pitching 3 of 5 games puts you on track to make 97 appearances: that's too many.) Maybe Westbrook has an exceptionally-bad outing and you have to bring in Scott Lewis in the 3rd

inning. But Huff is at least CAPABLE of picking him up the next day. Maybe you could use one 3-inning guy in place of 3 1-inning guys in relief of one of the 7-inning guys. Ultimately, it would be neat to take advantage of your strengths (a large number of multi-inning pitchers) instead of trying to fight through your weaknesses (a large number of pitchers who cannot go three or four times through an order).

4) Trevor Crowe is an island

The Twins were hamstrung by their complete inability to hit with runners in scoring position. Their only run was the result of a double, stolen base, and wild pitch. In all, the Twins went an astonishing 0-for-13 with runners in scoring position,

involving good-to-excellent hitters (Denard Span, Joe Mauer, Justin Morneau, Jason Kubel a combined 0-for-7), bad hitters (Joe Crede and Mike Redmond 0-for-4), and execrable hitters (Alexi Casilla 0-for-2).

The Indians weren't much better: good hitters were 0-for-2 (Shin-Soo Choo), mediocre hitters were 0-for-1 (Jhonny Peralta), a poor hitter was 0-for-1 (Luis Valbuena), and utterly hopeless hitters were 0-for-1 (Wyatt Toregas).

But with two men on in the 7th inning, Trevor Crowe laced Nick Blackburn's first offering into the left-center field gap, a well struck ball that plated Travis Hafner and put

runners on second and third. This proved to be the game-winning run and was the only hit with a runner in scoring position by either team all day.

Counting July 31st as "August zeroth," Crowe now has an extra-base hit in four of his six games in "Extenda-August," nearly half of his 9 hits. He may never hit a lot of home runs (or, in fact, any whatsoever), but he has demonstrated that he has at least "gap power," and is a more viable candidate because of it.

Crowe has as many doubles as

Jamey Carroll in fewer than half the plate appearances: he has as many extra-base hits as Chris Gimenez and Matt LaPorta combined, which signifies absolutely nothing.

5) Flashing the leather

Part of the reason that Carmona's first couple of innings didn't snowball into catastrophe was because of two fine defensive plays on the left side of the infield. Asdrubal Cabrera made a fine diving stop on a ground ball, but more shockingly, so did Jhonny Peralta.

Without these two plays, we're probably talking about a couple-three runs and a loss.

6) Stick men

Each of Asdrubal Cabrera, Shin-Soo Choo, and Travis Hafner collected a pair of hits. Cabrera laced his 27th double of the season. Choo is the only Cleveland player with more than 20 AB with an OBP starting with "4." Hafner is maintaining a SLG over .500 and has only struck out 35 times this season. It would be

the first time in his career that a pro-rated 500 AB season would feature fewer than 100 strikeouts. (Of course, he also has 29 RBI, which is half as many as Jhonny Peralta and fewer than Ben Fungusco.)

7) Theatre of the Absurd

The Chris Gimenez Experience, rather than growing on me, is beginning to grate.

The Wyatt Toregas Experience,
rather than grating on me, simply
puzzles.

The Matt LaPorta Experience,
rather than puzzling me, reminds
me of "Brigadoon."

8) Carl Pavano, Minnesota Twin

In writing the proper ode for Carl
Pavano, who has been traded to

the Twins for Nothing to Be Named Later, I am reminded of the classic cartoon, "[The Dover Boys](#) :" uot;

*And now, it is time to say,
"Good Bye."□
Good Bye.*