

## The B-List: 8/21-8/23

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The Indians took two of three from the Mariners this weekend on the strength of some very good starting pitching (and despite some truly bad starting pitching), including an encouraging outing from Fausto Carmona and a friendly reminder of the past from Aaron Laffey. Buff also thinks Chris Perez is nifty, that Matt LaPorta is swell, and that the combo of Wyatt Toregas and Andy Marte is much more powerful than ... well, he'll get back to you on that. **FINAL**

<b>Mariners (63-59)</b>	0	1	2	4
<b>Indians (52-69)</b>	0	1	0	0

W: French (3-3) L: Huff (7-7)

<b>FINAL</b>	1	2	3	4
<b>Mariners (63-60)</b>	3	0	0	0
<b>Indians (53-69)</b>	0	0	1	1

W: R. Perez (2-2) L: Messenger (0-1)

<b>FINAL</b>	1	2	3	4
<b>Mariners (63-61)</b>	0	0	0	1
<b>Indians (54-69)</b>	1	0	0	1

W: Carmona (3-8) L: F. Hernandez (12-5)

It's the first day of school!

### 1) Another notch in the "Ace" column

For anyone who was doubting that Aaron Laffey is preparing to make the transition from "decent pitcher" to "Cleveland's Ace," consider that he is in the process of learning to master that most arcane of Cleveland Ace arts ...

... the **Inning of Crap™!**

Yes, Aaron Laffey could hardly have started in a less-impressive fashion on Saturday, cleverly walking Franklin Gutierrez on five pitches before allowing a two-out single to the desiccated husk of Mike Sweeney, whereupon right fielder Shin-Soo Choo got into the act and airmailed a throw to Not Jhonny Peralta to produce Seattle's first run. However, this run was still considered an EARNED run for Laffey because ... after getting two swings and misses from Russ Branyan (which, really now, is simply de rigeur), he grooved a pitch somewhere between the mid-thigh and the belt after inscribing, "Hit me, Russ!" right under the MLB logo on the ball. Branyan hit the ball approximately three thousand ninety-four feet, and the Tribe was down 3-0 before Dandy Doug Fister had even stepped to the mound.

*(Branyan is having a wonderful season, and I'm glad for him. Not only is he producing in an everyday role, something I was skeptical he could ever do, but his hometown Warner Robins, GA Little League team is in the Little League World Series. So huzzahs all around for the Branyan family! But the man can swing and miss. Boy, howdy, yes. With 143 punchouts, the man has struck out 24% more often than Cleveland's lead whiffer, Shin-Soo Choo ... 46% more often than noted windmill Jhonny Peralta ... and a grotesque 59% more often than Grady Sizemore, about whom many complain incessantly with respect to strikeouts. Branyan has 30 homers on the season and has been a productive player, but getting Russ Branyan to miss a two-strike pitch ... I'm just sayin', it's **not that hard**. Don't throw him that pitch with two strikes. Hell, don't throw him THAT pitch at ALL. I'm thinkin' either the slider low and away or the fastball up around his ears. I've seen him miss those. And miss those. And miss those.)*

To Laffey's credit, this represented the sum total of the Mariners' output against Laffey, who did allow a pair of runners to reach scoring position

but never any runner as far as third. In fact, the Mariners spent the rest of the game going 0-for-9 with runners in scoring position, and Laffey ended up with the Quality Start, going 7 innings and allowing just the three runs on 8 hits and a pair of walks.

Loyal reader My Dad™ pointed out that I really shouldn't be getting on Laffey's case for walking two batters a game over his recent stretch, and sure, two walks is not egregious, but the point is, two walks is the LOW in 7 of his past 8 starts. Okay, I guess 1 is the low over those 8 starts. I still think walking 19 guys in 50 innings is too damn many. And it bears mentioning that one of his three runs allowed was to a guy who walked.

Technically, I suppose, I would like for Laffey to have nibbled a bit more to Branyan, but ... no, that was simply an execrable pitch, and it is to Laffey's credit that he eventually overcame it.

But it was an O-ficial, bona fide, **Inning of Crap™**.

*(For any new readers, this was a feature of C.C. Sabathia's pitching.)*

## 2) Encouragement leavened by caution

On one level, the fact that Fausto Carmona struck out 8 hitters in 7 innings while walking only 1 is tremendously exciting. With a terrific 76:40 strike-to-ball ratio, it would appear on the surface that Carmona, at least for one day, harnessed his stuff to look more like the frontline-calibre starter of 2007 than the hopeless blunderbuss of 2008 (or, frankly, 2009).

Certainly 5 hits and 1 run in 7 innings is good work. The strikeouts are kind of a bonus: it's the tiny number of walks that's really thrilling. Except ... here, look, I hate to cast aspersions on a guy after such a great outing, but Carmona got 18 swings and misses from the Mariners yesterday. Eighteen! That's a lot of swings and misses. He got 12 in his previous outing, so it's not an unprecedently-high number. Carmona does have good stuff, after all: it was just a matter of whether he could put it in the strike zone.

But, see, here's the thing: I can't help wondering if he **WAS** putting the ball in the strike zone.

I watch a bunch of Carmona's strikeouts over again, and yeah, I mean, that's some mean stuff. Hard to hit that ball. But at least a couple times, that ball looked a lot like the sinker that Boston Red Sox hitters (for example) were letting drift by them, even with two strikes, and getting them called balls. Maybe I don't have the eye for it, and these pitches are better than those pitches. I'm watchin' a little window on a computer screen via MLB.tv. I just don't want Fausto to get all married to that single dropoff pitch and have nothing else to go to if it isn't getting called.

To his credit, he struck out Ken Griffey, Jr. on a changeup, something he admitted he wouldn't have tried last year. Adding a credible changeup to the arsenal is a good thing.

Anyway, I hardly want to wave red flags and say, "This game was a fluke! It doesn't count! Carmona's still bad! I snort the nose, Lucifer!" No, he built on some successful outings and produced his best game in a long time. And even though three of the five hits were for extra-bases, 1 run on 5 hits and a walk in 7 complete innings is good stuff. Let's hope it

continues.

### 3) Win-win deal

As with Russ Branyan, it is with no bitterness that I acknowledge the fine season that Franklin Gutierrez is having with the Mariners. Universally regarded as one of the top defensive outfielders in the league, which is a huge plus for a team like Seattle that plays in a gigantic stadium, Gutierrez is also hitting a nice .285 on the season. It was more a situation in Cleveland where we really couldn't take full advantage of the things he had to offer (excellent center field defense, nascent offensive skills) than anything else: I would rather have Shin-Soo Choo in right field than F-Goot, and he wouldn't have been utilized properly in left.

However, the player he was traded for has some positive attributes as well. With a game-ending 11<sup>th</sup>-inning homer, Luis Valbuena collected his 7<sup>th</sup>

homer on the season, and is now hitting an improbable

.300/.354/.517 in August and .297/.360/.495 after the All-Star Break. While I seriously doubt that Valbuena is a full-time .500 SLG player, it is apparent that his offensive approach is a good one, and that he can be considered a regular at second base for a while to come. He still leans heavily to the left, but I don't see anything in his swing or stance that completely precludes him from eventually hitting left-handed pitching.

#### **4) Please don't make me write about David Huff**

More seriously, could it be fatigue? He's only at 95 1/3 major-league innings, but ... man, I dunno. He sure is bad in August, though.

Before the All-Star Break, Huff posted a 6.71 ERA with a WHIP of 1.63. After the break, the ERA is about the same at 6.92, but the WHIP has spawned buboes and risen to 1.79. I mean, that's just dreadful. He is reeking. Maybe skipping him in

September won't stunt his development too much.

## **5) A new bullpen acquisition plan**

In 2007, I lightheartedly suggested that the bullpen should stock up on more Raffies, given that our two best pitchers were Raffy Betancourt and Raffy Perez.

To this end, I would like to acquire more pitchers named &quot;Perez.&quot;

Chris Perez' first outing with the Indians could hardly have been more comical, giving up 4 runs on 2 hits in 2/3 of an inning. Through his first three outings, it was debatable that Chris could improve the Cleveland bullpen, which at the time consisted of Laughable Johnson and Talentless McGillicuddy.

Since July 8<sup>th</sup>, Chris Perez has appeared in 15 games. In these 15 games, he has:

15 IP

5 H

19 K

4 BB

0 R

7 of the 15 games have featured 2 strikeouts, and only once did that require more than 4 outs to record (in that game, it took 6). He has 3 games in 15 in which he did NOT strike out a batter, and one of those games he faced a single batter.

As a footnote (which is tremendously odd, given his history), Raffy Perez now has 5 scoreless

outings and hasn't walked a hitter since August 8<sup>th</sup>: given that walks were a big problem for Raffy earlier this year, it gives one some hope for the future.

## **6) On sons, those prodigal and those less so**

This weekend, I saw these statistics posted by two young players:

Matt LaPorta: 4-for-12, 2 doubles, 3 R  
Chris Gimenez: 0-for-0

Both of these stat lines made me happy.  
Only one of them was truly predictable.

## **7) Credit Where Credit Is Unexpected Dept.**

Wyatt Toregas may never be an everyday catcher, but the man got two hits and a walk on Friday and drew a walk and added a sacrifice fly on Sunday.

Toregas' overall numbers are still dismal, with nary an extra-base hit to place him in the Tyner Zone at .231/.290/.231, but he isn't thoroughly overmatched at the plate (he's just plain overmatched) and appears

to be capable of catching in a way that Gimenez and Garko before him were not. If the decision is made that Kelly Shoppach is too expensive and that either Lou Marson or Carlos Santana is ready to be thrown into the deep end of the pool, Toregas looks like he could fill in in a Greg Zaun/Mike Redmond sort of way, which isn't a bad thing.

## **8) Other bright spots**

Travis Hafner hit a blast off Dandy Doug for his 12<sup>th</sup> of the season. Jhonny Peralta added his 10<sup>th</sup> of the season off King Felix, albeit on a very non-King-Felix sort of pitch.

(Truthfully, I am not sure which number surprises me more. I am thinking, in all honesty, that I'm more surprised that Peralta has only 10 than I am that Hafner has only 12, largely based on playing time expectations.)

Tony Sipp made a pair of scoreless appearances. Joe Smiff added a perfect inning with a strikeout and 11 strikes in 15 pitches. Smiff, in my opinion, would have the harder time convincing people that he was actually a Perez.

Grady Sizemore laced a triple ... to LEFT. (The fielder, Ryan Langerhans,

hurt himself diving for the ball, but it's still a triple to LEFT.)

Andy Marte slugged a PAIR of hits with 2 RBI on Friday. Sadly, David Huff and Tomo Ohka were pitching in that game, and the hits played no role whatsoever in the game's decision. Marte is now slugging ... .259. He has one more extra-base hit than Wyatt Toregas, who has zero, and Jeremy Duncan, who is a cartoon character.

## **9) Curmudgeon Corner Revisited**

Kerry Wood got to finish Friday's game.

The universe prevented him from finishing Saturday's game as well: in this sense, the Indians can shrug and say, "Hey, we tried, Kerry, sorry old bean," while secretly exchanging fist-bumps after he leaves the room.

I am rooting for the universe here.