

**The B-List: 9/4 - 9/6**

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}  
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The Indians took two of three from the fading Minnesota Twins this weekend, and Buff tells us that David Huff pitched admirably for a guy who hasn't done that many times this season. He also thinks that Jeremy Sowers can be an asset rather than a liability, that Michael Brantley would be a nice new leadoff hitter, that Jhonny Peralta is better than Andy Marte, and that Kerry Wood is pitching well since the calendar turned to August. Send him email. He likes email. **FINAL**

<b>Twins (67-67)</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Indians (59-75)</b>	0	0	3	0

W: Sowers (6-9) L: Pavano (11-11) S: K. Wood (18)

<b>FINAL</b>	1	2	3	4
<b>Twins (68-67)</b>	0	0	0	2
<b>Indians (59-76)</b>	0	0	1	0

W: Baker (13-7) L: Masterson (4-7) S: Nathan (36)

<b>FINAL</b>	1	2	3	4
<b>Twins (68-68)</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Indians (60-76)</b>	0	0	0	0

W: Huff (9-7) L: Blackburn (9-10) S: K. Wood (19)



One man's pitcher's duel is another man's offensive ineptitude.

## 1) Almost like insight

A while back I [opined](#) that David Huff might be struggling mightily because of fatigue. Of course, I didn't have a lot of evidence to back this up: Huff hit the ground sucking and pretty much kept this scorchingly-bad pace going all season long. His home ERA is 5.89, his road ERA 6.49. His ERA during the day is 6.00: at night, 6.46. On grass, he sports a 6.00, while on turf it's 7.17. His best month was June in which he had a 4.84 ERA: his other three months were May at 10.97, July at 6.60, and August at 7.11. Sure, those numbers are trending worse since June, but it's not like 108 innings is a ton of death-defying innings. His numbers are more goodness-defying than anything.

But this time, skipped in the rotation once to allow Carlos Carrasco to vie for the Mantle of Suck, Huff returned after extra rest and was ... well ... *brilliant*.

Is this a fluke? Well, in one sense, of COURSE it's a fluke. No one pitches a two-hitter every time out, and rare indeed is the pitcher with a 0.50 K:BB ratio (Huff walked 4 and struck out 2 in the game) who has a 1.29 ERA. For all the grief I give David Huff, he is a major-league pitcher, and a 25-year-old rookie pitcher is going to have extremes on both sides. He has stuff, or he wouldn't be here.

On another level, though, despite the Twins going through a horrific offensive stretch (they got 17 hits all weekend, including only 13 in 19 innings against Cleveland's marginal youthful starters, Huff was in control (in a manner of speaking) and largely throttled Minnesota's bats. He completed 7 innings and only gave up a base hit in ONE of them. Two of his innings were perfect, he faced the minimum in another thanks to a double play, and his last inning's only baserunner reached on an error (in other words, no walks nor hits). And each of his innings came in a close game, either scoreless, behind 1-0, or tied 1-1. (It wasn't until starter Nick Blackburn faded that the Indians even appeared capable of winning the game for Huff.)

There are still some awfully big chinks in Huff's armor: fewer than half of the hitters (13 of 27) saw a first-pitch strike, and 57 strikes in 107 pitches isn't good. Four walks is quite poor, and a 2-to-4 K:BB ratio is putrescent. The double play was pretty lucky as a liner that doubled a runner off second, and several outs were line drives hit right at fielders.

But really, the man gave up two hits in seven innings. He held the Twins, who are fighting for their playoff lives (and failing), to a single run and pitched well with runners on base. Given that he had such success with extra rest, I'd be inclined to give him one more start in the same manner (say the Sept. 18-20 series) and then shut him down. There is word that this might have been his last game of the season, anyway: I'd just like to see if he could build on this start. On the other hand, if it IS his last start, it's a terrific way to go into the off-season on a high.

Note that there is a significant chance that David Huff will be the Cleveland pitcher with the most wins this season (9, tied with Carl Pavano). Aaron Laffey has 7 wins and probably four more starts. Jeremy Sowers has 6 and is not as good as Laffey. When is the last time a Cleveland pitcher led his team in wins with NINE?

## **2) Not as good is still pretty good**

Speaking of Sowers, his start Friday against (of all people) Pavano was a marked contrast to Huff's in that Sowers is showing good stamina and much better accuracy. He threw 4 fewer strikes in 16 fewer pitches, and did not walk a single batter. He did give up 2 runs on 6 hits in 6 innings, meaning he gave up more runs and hits in fewer innings, but he was still largely in control of the game despite his customary Sowerization his final two frames.

Anyone who got particularly excited by the first three perfect innings has not paid much attention to Jeremy Sowers' career to date. He does that PLENTY of times. He's gone five perfect innings to start a game multiple times. And sure, the single in the 4<sup>th</sup> was ultimately harmless.

But then he gave up a leadoff double to lefty-fearing Jason Kubel and gave up two more singles to yield his first run. And in the sixth, a pair of singles and a sacrifice fly preceded a hit batsman and a chance to completely collapse against Mike Cuddyer with two men aboard.

To Sowers' credit, he did not collapse, despite starting Cuddyer 2-0. In Sowers last eight starts, he has given up 2 runs or fewer 5 times (once lasting only 4 2/3 innings because of a rain delay, but it was still a nice start). Since July 7<sup>th</sup>, Sowers has lowered his ERA by a full run, from 5.78 to 4.78. If pressed, I would certainly consider Sowers part of the Opening Day rotation next season. I wouldn't be especially EXCITED by this, but I wouldn't be fearful, either.

If there were somehow a way to leverage Sowers' early-game dominance into an asset rather than something that simply precedes a horrific propensity to collapse, Sowers could be a terrific chit to play rather than one to eventually hide. Consider this: I don't really trust the "by pitches" stats listed on his ESPN card, because they don't make intuitive sense to me (although they fit the overall pattern below very starkly), but from Baseball Reference:

1<sup>st</sup> inning: .190/.235/.302  
2<sup>nd</sup> inning: .161/.212/.258  
3<sup>rd</sup> inning: .212/.268/.318  
4<sup>th</sup> inning: .227/.297/.348  
**5<sup>th</sup> inning: .414/.470/.600**

**6<sup>th</sup> inning: .400/.500/.540**

Pitch count:

1-25: .193/.246/.312

26-50: .195/.248/.268

**51-75: .381/.438/.522**

**76-100: .310/.425/.534**

(Again, go look at ESPN's "by 15s" numbers.)

Times facing an opponent in a game:

1<sup>st</sup> PA: .165/.222/.247

2<sup>nd</sup> PA: .303/.355/.441

**3<sup>rd</sup> PA: .372/.451/.553**

By "leverage," which has to do with outs and runners on base and the score of the game:

Low leverage: .232/.297/.358

Medium leverage: .241/.315/.351

**High leverage: .431/.469/.631**

The six times a player has gotten a fourth whack at Jeremy Sowers, they have two doubles and three walks. A single out was recorded.

I know I've written about the tandem starter thing here before, and yeah, it's not optimal for however many reasons. I still think it could work in a very fundamental way, because on those days, you would be RESTING your

bullpen for the most part except for the one guy who works in tandem with Sowers. Consider this: in four games, you use four starters. Let's say you need six relievers to back these guys up. I mean, that's even excessive, right? A twelve-man staff has seven relievers backing up five starters. So 6 backing up 4 is even more cautious, right? Well then, on the fifth day, you have Sowers and Otherguy. Sure, you might need a closer, and sure, you might need a matchup reliever, but look: while others may justifiably fear the horrific ends of typical Sowers starts, look at the front-parts of these starts. They are great!

He holds guys to a .165 AVG and .222 OBP the first time through a lineup. That's really excellent! And they're still hitting like meatballs through four innings. Look! .227/.297/.348, and each of those numbers is the HIGH POINT in the first four innings. I'm telling you, this is an

ASSET. Not a guy you pitch because you HAVE to: if you have THIS guy, you WANT to pitch him. For four innings. (Maybe five.)

Now, who is "Otherguy"? I couldn't really tell you. It could be Justin Masterson, whose leverage scores (possibly because he cut his major-league teeth as a reliever for Boston) go in the opposite direction of Sowers'. It could be Hector Rondon, who really shouldn't throw anything like 200 major-league innings next season (and may, in fact, throw zero). It could be Carlos Carrasco, whom I wouldn't know from Bubbles the Powerpuff Girl. Shoot, it could be that Sowers spends his time warming up from the first pitch and he comes in in the 5<sup>th</sup>, becoming "Otherguy" himself.



But I'm telling you: Jeremy Sowers has a strength, and I'm not telling you that the Indians should manage **AROUND** it: they need to figure out a way to manage **TO** it. Because Sowers at his best is **BETTER** than just about anyone else's on the roster. (And his worst is ... well ... just as bad.)

### **3) The soul of wit**

Justin Masterson pitched pretty well, all things considered: he gave up only five hits in six innings, gave up only one unearned run and didn't "deserve" the loss, and induced **THREE** double plays, which is very good.

But I'm sorry: if you walk five guys in six innings, you are a Clod.

## **4) I have seen the future**

And in this alternate future, Michael Brantley is the Cleveland Indians' leadoff hitter.

Look, I understand that small samples are even less meaningful when they are pitifully tiny. 24 plate appearances is nothing. And for a guy whose calling card was supposed to be this otherworldly ability to draw a walk, the fact that Brantley has only 1 walk in those 24 plate appearances makes you

wonder if he can really translate that skill, especially since nary a one of his 9 hits to date have involved a second base. There's no reason not to throw strikes to Michael Brantley, even with runners on base, because he likely won't swing at a ball and if he hits it, it won't be any worse than a single.

But do the math: he has NINE HITS. In six games. And 23 ABs. Meaning he is hitting .391 in his September callup, mostly against real major-league pitching, except for Nate Robertson.

In fact, Brantley has played in six games and has never NOT gotten a hit. He has

three multi-hit games and three single-hit games. But just as encouragingly, some of the OUTS he's made have been notable, including a line drive through the box that Rick Porcello caught while trying to avoid, and a shot to right that would have been a gap double had it strayed a degree to the left.

Bratley is 22 and has the plate approach of a much older player. He is also fast (although not fast enough to steal a base when the entire stadium knows he's running) and a savvy baserunner. One of the entertaining plays Sunday came in the 7<sup>th</sup>

inning when he drove in Luis Valbuena from second on a single, then got caught trying to advance on the throw home. He

retreated to first, but never gave up on the play, and at the last minute, reversed course and ran toward second. Although Cuddyer did catch up with him, his falling tag was ruled invalid as he dropped the ball, and Brantley was ruled safe at second.

Hey, I don't want to make too much of a (very) young guy's hot start in his debut. Brantley is not a better player than Grady Sizemore, and if that's the choice, then obviously Brantley gets to see more of Columbus. But in some ways, Brantley is more of the pure leadoff hitter than Sizemore is, and his game approach is a lot more mature than the average 22-year-olds'. (He'll still be 22 on Opening Day.) Can he hit enough to

justify being a corner outfielder? Let's ask Denard Span, currently hitting .310/.395/.408 with 95 games at corner slots. Yeah, those numbers "look better" in center ... but if you get Grady Sizemore numbers from Grady Sizemore, those numbers would play in left, yeah.

(This assumes that Matt LaPorta is the 1B next season: if he's in left, Brantley gets more Columbing.)

## **5) Jamey Carroll, left fielder**

No.

## **6) Jhonny Peralta hits the ball**

Brantley wasn't the only player to get a hit in each of the three games: Peralta had a double on each of Friday and Saturday and collected 4 hits total for the series. Both of his hits on Friday drove in a run in a 5-2 affair, and his single Sunday tied the game at 1 apiece.

Peralta has hits in 8 of his last 10 games, and one of the hitless games

was a 1-PA affair. It's worth noting that 10 hits in his past 10 games, Peralta's average has moved from .275 to .275: that is to say, none. Part of this is because he has over 500 PA, but part of this is because he has been a consistent hitter over the past two months.

And, of course, Andy Marte has turned into the proverbial newt: homer aside, Marte is now mired in a 2-for-21 September, and although both hits are homers, his .095/.095/.381 September contributes to his .238/.288/.426 overall numbers that once again pale in comparison to Peralta's.



Here's the thing: I never meant to claim that Marte is as talented and accomplished as Peralta. But I still maintain that next year's roster has precious little reason to include both players. If you can get something truly valuable for Jhonny Peralta, you should consider it seriously. And if you can't, but you can get something valuable for the minimum-salaried Andy Marte, you have to consider that seriously as well. Right now, I'd rather have Peralta. But I'm not going to get all hair-shirty over either player.

## **7) Welcome back!**

No, wait, you're still Jose Veras! Get off my team! Aaah! Aaah! Aaaaaaah!

(He pitched well. I don't care.)

## **8) Honest Opinion Search Result**

You would not believe the avalanche of emails I received when I asked for readers to tell me if Luis Valbuena is a good defensive second baseman. His name is Brent.

Anyway, the consensus of Brent is that Valbuena has good defensive tools but lacks the game-in, game-out concentration that experienced veteran players have. In other words, in a survey of Brent, the majority of Brent agrees that Valbuena CAN be a very good defensive second baseman, but that currently, he is only average.

## **9) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.**

As much as I might grumble about it, the fact is, I appreciate and respect the job Kerry Wood has done recently. He could have complained about not having

save opportunities. He could have simply shut down with a minor injury in a lost season. I'm not trying to project some false sense of altruism on a guy who gets a bonus for finishing games: of COURSE he's not going to shut it down, but he's not drawing any negative attention to himself, either.

And, of course, he's pitching a lot like a top-end closer as well. In August, he appeared in 11 games, only THREE of which were save opportunities. In those 11 innings, he gave up 2 runs on 11 hits, striking out 14 guys. And in September thus far, he's 2-for-2 in save ops with two perfect innings including 2 Ks.

Wood has hardly had a good season: he's walked nearly a guy every other inning to contribute to a WHIP of 1.35, which is awful for an elite closer. His ERA of 4.22 isn't good for the role he's in. He has 19 saves in 24 opportunities, which isn't special, although it's good-esque. But he's really been pitching well lately, and deserves credit for that.

However, this does not relieve me of my obligation.

**10) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine**

Eric Wedge tasers monkeys. Although I have no direct evidence of this, it is completely untrue. Do not let Kerry Wood finish games to vest his third-year option