

The B-List: 9/22

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
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The Indians did nothing to slow Detroit's drive to clinch the A.L. Central despite an excellent start from Aaron Laffey. In today's B-List, Buff notes some interesting things about how Detroit hitters approached Laffey, laments the lack of control of the Cleveland bullpen, and gets some insight from a Detroit blogger on Blunder Ed Jackson. **FINAL**

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Tigers (80-70)	0	0	1	0
Indians (61-89)	0	0	0	0

W: E. Jackson (13-7) L: Laffey (7-7) S: Rodney (34)

Win-loss rules are stupid: Chris Perez lost this game, not Aaron Laffey.

1) Bounceback

Aaron Laffey's last start was very poor, and this one did not get off to a particularly auspicious start. The first four hitters all hit the ball hard on ropes, with a single up the middle, a lineout to center, an opposite-field alley double, and a lineout to second. Even Marcus Thames' groundout was hit pretty solidly, and it looked like a long night for Laffey despite the narrow escape.

However, Laffey settled down soon thereafter: yes, he gave up a solo shot to Ryan Raburn, but it made it over the fence by about a foot and a half. He induced double-play grounders in the 2nd and 6th innings. He walked three guys, but the first was on a 3-2 count and his last didn't come until he was laboring a bit in the 7th

. Well, not really "laboring," but his command seemed to be seeping away at that point. Still, he didn't give up an extra-base hit after the third and ended up giving up 1 run on 7 hits in 6 2/3 innings for a very nice outing.

What was interesting to me was to see the Detroit approach to hitting Laffey:

1st inning: 1 pulled, 2 center, 2 other way
2nd inning: 0 pulled, 1 center, 1 other way (DP)
3rd inning: 1 pulled, 4 other way
4th inning: 2 pulled, 1 bunted
5th inning: 1 pulled, 1 other way (1 BB CS)
6th inning: 2 pulled, 2 other way
7th inning: 2 pulled, 1 other way

Note that 3 of the 9 pulled balls came off the bat of Marcus Thames, who is possibly physically incapable of NOT pulling the ball. Well, I mean, he's capable of missing the ball entirely, sure, but playing a right fielder against Marcus Thames is a quaint, nostalgic nod to the days of yore when players could hit the ball in multiple directions.

But more importantly, here are the hits that Detroit piled up while pulling the ball:

6th inning: Magglio Ordonez singled to left center

One. The Tigers got ONE hit pulling the ball off Aaron Laffey. They made 8 outs.

Now, obviously, part of this is the way that Laffey pitches. He is not going to throw a lot of chest-high four-seam fastballs on the inside corner. At least, I certainly hope he doesn't start doing this. No, Laffey is going to turn the ball over, he's going to throw a sinker, and he's going to keep the ball away. And that's a worthy approach for a guy like Laffey: what Detroit showed is the twin-edged sword:

Laffey was doing this very well with consistency
Detroit waited on the ball and looked for it there

Now, frankly, past the first inning, Laffey's performance was quite good. I will take 1 run in 6 2/3 innings every time out. So there's something to be said for the fact that even when you know what Laffey is throwing you, it's still not entirely easy to hit well.

I know that every time Cleveland produces a left-handed pitcher who is known for subpar stuff but "smarts, control, and pitching acumen," some knee-jerk reactor is going to bring up the name of Tom Glavine, not

fully recognizing that there is precisely one Tom Glavine and many, many Chris Nabholzses and Dave Ottoes and Dave Flemings and Gumby McSchmendricks. And sure enough, if you look at the Comparable Pitchers for Laffey, you do indeed get Glavine and Jamie Moyer, but also Jason Jacome, Fleming, and Horacio Ramirez, names that should give you some pause indeed.

Frankly, I'm starting to pick up a John Tudor vibe from Laffey. It's worth noting that Tudor made his major-league debut at age 25, an age that Laffey still hasn't reached.

Anyway, I'd still like to teach Laffey a cutter to give him another weapon and saw off some of the bats of guys who are trying to take him the other way (you don't have to throw 95 mph for a cutter to bore in on a guy reaching out across the plate). But this was a good bounceback outing from Laffey in any event.

2) A quick word about strikes

Strikes!

3) Role now defined

Let's say you were confused about how the team feels about Andy Marte. Let's say you're wondering to yourself, "Does this team see Marte as a significant piece in 2010?" Is Marte going to be exposed to the waiver wire (as he is out of options), or is he going to go into Spring Training next season with a good shot to earn the 3B, 1B, or 4-corner jobs? Marte had a hot streak that made him look good and an extended cold streak that made him look positively awful. With Grady Sizemore out, the team is taking an extended look at guys like Matt LaPorta, Trevor Crowe, and Michael Brantley ... but Marte has been in and out of the lineup at 1B, a position which isn't a very good fit for him in the first place.

After Matt LaPorta injured his hip, Andy Marte replaced him at first base. He got two plate appearances, seeing a massive four pitches and shrewdly popping out each

time.

With a rally-type flourish, the Indians loaded the bases in the 8th inning of a 3-0 game. One power swing would actually give the Indians the lead: even a double might potentially tie the game. You'd really like to send up a hitter with some pop, and Marte has hit 5 homers in only 120 AB. Andy Marte's spot rolled around in the order ...

... and *Jamey Carroll* pinch-hit for him.

Andy Marte is *done*. (As a Cleveland Indian.)

4) How to give up two runs on one well-hit ball

Walk the first two hitters.

Look, Chris Perez is an intriguing power arm in the bullpen, and I'm on record as saying that he should play a prominent role on next year's team, possibly even Closer. He has 65 Ks in 51 2/3 IP.

Right-handers hit a paltry .214 off him ... and lefties actually hit worse (.180)! He went through a long string of scoreless outings, and I'm in favor of him being considered a prime part of future success.

But look now: after bailing out Laffey in the 7th, he walked the first guy in the 8th

on FOUR PITCHES. And then he walked the NEXT guy on FIVE pitches. One strike in nine pitches. That's atrocious! It's the leadoff guys! With Miggy Cabrera coming up! Great googly moogly! Throw strikes!

5) Hip to be square

With two outs and two on in the 2nd inning, Trevor Crowe laced a single to left with Matt LaPorta on second base. Ersatz outfielder Ryan Raburn threw to the plate, where catcher Gerald Laird caught the ball, ate a sandwich, whittled a pan flute, composed a symphony, and took a brisk nap before tagging LaPorta out at the plate for the final out of the inning.

There are three things about this play:

a) I have no problem
"challenging" Raburn's arm in left. He's an infielder. However, as we saw with guys like Casey Blake and Mark DeRosa, infielders can possess strong arms, especially if they've played third, and Raburn has. Still, given a good opportunity,

making him make that play is, all things considered, acceptable.

b) Unless the runner on second base hasn't even gotten to third base yet. Then you hold him. Because either he got a bad jump, or he's quite slow, and he's taken 1.05 Garkoes to reach you. How many times did this happen a couple of series' ago? Twice in one game, right? I mean the second guy had rounded third and was faster and it was a better shot, but wasn't the first guy gunned down like nobody's business? Well, that's what happened to LaPorta, who pointed out that there's a third option for why he hadn't reached third base:

c) LaPorta hurt his hip on the play.

Now, I don't know how you diagnose "inflammation" on a baserunning play. Maybe it was tender. Maybe his pants no longer fit. I gotta think he jammed it or something. But please ... please ... PLEASE ... someone pray hard enough to make this neither a torn labrum nor Son of Albert Belle. We really need LaPorta next season.

Here's a quick question, though: let's say you are Matt LaPorta, chugging, rumbling, Garkoing down to third base. Your hip hurts. Something is clearly not right. You see Leela the One-Eyed Third Base Coach

waving you home. But your hip hurts. Maybe you should ... stop? You can explain that one after the fact, right? So I'm really kind of hoping he hurt it from third to home, because ... otherwise, he's no smarter than Joel Skinner, which bodes ill for everyone.

6) Tony Sipp, show us how it's done

20 pitches and ... 8 strikes! Two walks in 1 1/3 IP, and if it weren't for Adam Everett's generosity interfering with poor Lou Marson, he wouldn't have retired ANY of the first three hitters in the 9th.

Here, perhaps some haiku will help here:

*Lo, we tell the tale□
The pitcher who threw no strikes□
He was F*#&ING FIRED!*

*Throw strikes, yea, throw strikes□
Make all of your pitches be□
Strikes in the strike zone*

*Strikes, strikes, strikes, strikes, strikes,□
Strikes, strikes, strikes, strikes, strikes,
strikes, strikes,□*

Strikes, strikes, strikes, strikes, strikes

7) Clutchness at the ballyard

Actually, the Indians hit a non-putrid 1-for-5 with a walk with runners in scoring position. The problem was more that they hit into three double plays, got a guy pegged out at home, and generally bailed Detroit pitchers out when ahead in the count.

However, the mighty Tigers (from Detroit, not the Frosted Flakes

commercial) went a pitiful 1-for-11 in such circumstances and got a runner pegged out at second to boot.

8) Perspective from Detroit

I asked a Tigers blogger if this 7 innings of shutout ball represented a return to early-season form for Ed Jackson, who has been scuffling badly in the back half of the season. He'll be important to their playoff success (if they are to have any), so I was curious what a guy who's seen a lot of him thought. Joe Dexter of [Motor City Bengals](#)

writes:

I'll tell you this much: He isn't still the same Edwin Jackson. His pitches were sharper, he had better command but part of it was truly facing the Indians. He still had to battle out of major counts in order to be successful, and hitters laid off his slider.

Okay, now at this point I have to interrupt. What is the first thing you think of when you read, "hitters laid off his slider"?

a) Ed Jackson's slider must be very, very, mind-bogglingly bad for CLEVELAND hitters to lay off it

- b) He must have been in the bathroom when Jhonny Peralta was batting
- c) I know, he must have been watching Lou Marson, he hasn't been in Cleveland long enough to pick up the "Must ... Hit ... Dirt ... Slider ..." Team Motto
- d) I have been transported to an alternate universe: I wonder if John Kruk is sane in this one?

Sorry about that, Joe, back to you:

What will decide Edwin Jackson's success will continue to be the defense. If he gets what he has had, and pitches to contact, then he will be just fine. Will

he be dominating if the Tigers make the playoffs? Probably not. But he should be a good second option that keeps the offense in the game.

The way this bullpen is pitching, all he has to do is go six strong innings. Hopefully he holds up and gets a bit stronger as the playoffs near.

Ed Jackson faced 27 hitters last night and threw a first-pitch strike to SIX of them. SIX!!! He had three-ball counts to four of the first nine hitters, including 3 in the second inning ALONE. Jackson did himself some favors by inducing a

couple of double plays, but his game was a bit like Laffey's: he got lucky that Potatohead Polanco snared Asdrubal Cabrera's liner to double off Mike Brantley just before Shin-Soo Choo doubled in the first, and got a guy pegged out at the plate to end the second. After that, though: hey, 5 innings of 3-hit ball is pretty good.

I happen to think Joe is onto something when he thinks it was the Indians more than Jackson. Chalk me up as a guy who did not think he would hear "Detroit Tigers" and "bullpen as a strength" together this season, though.

9) And now a word from ... a guy ranting

Strikes!

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strikes strikes strikes strikes strikes
strikes strikes strikes strikes strikes
strikes!

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strikes strikes strikes strikes strikes
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strikes strikes strikes strikes strikes
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**strikes strikes strikes strikes strikes
strikes strikes strikes strikes
!**

10) Everybody gets on base!

Nice nights include a pair of walks from Marson, three hits from Choo (including a double), a pair of singles from Trevor Crowe, the World Most Pressure-Packed Clutchiest Walk Ever from Adorable J. Carroll (RBI, baby!), a pair of singles from Mike Brantley, and two walks from Travis Hafner.

Hafner's second walk yielded the boxscore amusement of the night, in that when Niuman Romero pinch-ran for him, Romero (*guffaw*) became (*snicker*) the DH (*h*
eebie-yuk!
).

Jhonny Peralta: no times on base. No soup for you. Well, actually, you can take Andy's soup.