

## The B-List: 9/23

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, September 23 2009 7:00 PM -

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Justin Masterson is not a starting pitcher. And he is unlikely to be one of the five pitchers that start the 2010 season in the Indians starting rotation. It was nearly unfathomable to think that way when Masterson came over as the centerpiece of the Victor Martinez trade. But that is the argument Buff makes in today's version of The B-List. Just eleven games left Tribe fans. And the Indians still need to win two of them to avoid 100 losses.

FINAL

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

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R

H

E

Tigers (81-70)

4

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2

2

1

2

0

0

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0

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5

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Indians (61-90)

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0

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0

2

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0

0

3

9

1

W: Porcello (14-9)      L: Masterson (4-9)



Great Scott, they're actually trying to kill me.

**1) That's one naked emperor there**

Convince me that Justin Masterson is a starting pitcher.

No, seriously. I know he's a young guy. I know he's transitioning from a successful bullpen stint. I know that starters are more valuable than relievers ... as long as they are valuable starters.

This may sound snide, but it's meant to be literal: the argument is that 180 good innings are more valuable than 60 very good innings, which I believe (especially since the "other"; 120 innings would go to a schmoie at this point), but read this statement carefully: 180 GOOD innings are more valuable.

They have to be GOOD.

Consider this: Justin Masterson posted a 4.08 ERA in 39 2/3 innings as a reliever. He gave up fewer than a hit an inning, and had a nice 43:13 K:BB ratio.

This is a K/9 rate of 9.76, good for a reliever, and more than a 3:1 ratio of strikeouts to walks.

His WHIP of 1.24 is nothing special (nor is 4.08 ERA, frankly), but it's certainly decent.

As a starter, Masterson has put up these numbers:

5.13 ERA  
64:45 K:BB  
7.14 K/9  
more than a hit an inning  
1.65 WHIP

Now, those numbers are simply dreadful. And that includes some starts as a Red Sox: his K:BB ratio in Cleveland is 40:33.

I can't really blame Masterson's struggles yesterday on walks: his only walk in the 4-run first was with two outs after all four runs had already scored. And certainly his defense did him no favors, as two of the runs were unearned.

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But Masterson gave up multiple runs in three different innings, including a pair of two-run homers that weren't cheap by any measure. He still struggles mightily against left-handed hitters, as evidenced by a double by Aubrey Huff, whose crusty yeastiness has been heated to a pleasant golden brown, and a single Clete Thomas, who is named &quot;Clete.&quot;

And, of course, his four-pitch walk to Mig Cabrera in the 3<sup>rd</sup>

came before the two-run blast by Carlos Guillen (batting lefty), so command is still an issue.

I don't want to make it sound like Masterson is incapable of getting lefties out: he struck out both Thomas and Curt Granderson, who are extremely left-handed. And yes, he's 24 with a GRAND TOTAL of 25 games started in the majors EVER.

You don't write off a guy based on 9 starts in Cleveland, especially not one who strikes out nearly a guy an inning for his career (175 in 208 2/3 IP).

I am far from calling for Justin Masterson's head.

His sinker is still a good pitch, and his comparables include guys like Josh Johnson, Mark Gubicza, and Scott Erickson, any of whom I'd happily take.

But at this point, Masterson needs more in his repertoire. He needs more options for left-handers, and better command of his secondary pitches against everyone.

In one very real way, starting is the only way for him to develop these things (if, in fact, they can be developed).

In another very real way, you can make an argument that Justin Masterson is not likely to be one of our five best starting pitchers on April 1, 2010.

Fun stat (for those who have fun gargling with bromine): Justin Masterson has pitched in 10 games for the Cleveland Indians. The team is 1-9 in those games. Woo hoo!

## 2) Bypassing the Mook Starter Kit, or New Heights in Depth

How can you tell if you're ready to put aside the Mook Starter Kit and graduate to new levels of suck? Why, simply apply the following tests!

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*Did you give up more hits than you recorded outs? Why yes, Mike Gosling gave up 5 hits in 1 1/3 IP, a brisk 5:4 hit-to-out ratio!*

*Did you give up more than one extra-base hit per inning? Why, yes! Three in 1 1/3 IP!*

*Did you give up more extra-base hits than singles, while yielding more than one single? He did!*

No problemo!

*Did you end the game with a higher ERA than Juan Veras, who appears to be a fungus? Why, yes, 5.57 to 5.51!*

Nice work!

*Did you manage to give up two extra-base hits to the SAME PLAYER? It's true!*

*Did you manage to give up an extra-base hit to a guy who slugs under .350 against same-handed pitchers? You did! Congratulations!*

*Did you throw more than 40 pitches and not get ANYONE to swing and miss at a pitch? In fact, did you allow contact on 25 of the 28 strikes you threw, while they watched the other three, knowing they had plenty of time to get one later?*

Oh, my, yes.

Super job, Mike Gosling! You have completed your Mook Starter Kit and have moved to the Advanced Schmoie Training Pack! At this rate, you should be able to acquire the coveted &quot;Bag of Phlegm&quot; rating by the end of the decade ... which is next week.

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I have faith in you, Mike. Just not as a relief pitcher. Or baseball player. Can you play the accordion?

### 3) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

It's not really fair to refer to Veras as fungal at this point, but I am all about being unfair when forced to make an emotional investment in this kind of performance. Still, it should be noted that last night's 1 2/3 scoreless innings (sure, he let one of Gosling's runners score, but hey) with 3 whiffs marked the third straight time Veras has gone more than 1 inning and been completely scoreless. In fact, the other two outings were hitless as well, and he's recorded 7 Ks in those 4 2/3 innings.

Further, Veras has recorded at least one K in each of his past 9 outings, going back to July 27<sup>th</sup>.

He has lowered his ERA from a high of 6.75 to its current 5.51, and although he's given up 6 runs in those 9 games (12 2/3 IP), only 3 were earned (although he gave up a homer in the 3 unearned run game, and you know how I feel about that).

That means in this stretch, Veras has given up:

7 H  
3 ER  
5 BB  
17 K

Sure, that's more walks than you want, but ... you know what? That's not a bad power arm at all. That's a 2.13 ERA, although a 4.26 RA, way more than a K an inning, and a WHIP under 1.00.

Yeah, the guy drives me crazy, and 8 homers in 47 1/3 IP is beyond atrocious, but 5 of those homers came with New York, whose stadium inflates homers by approximately nine thousand percent.

If Jose Veras opens the season in the Cleveland bullpen, it would not be the least-defensible decision ever made.

#### 4) Squander Ball in Theory and Practice and More Practice

Against the young yoot Rick Porcello, the Indians loaded the bases in the first inning with one out. Travis Hafner shrewdly hit a high-hopper behind the second base bag for an RBI groundout, and Luis Valbuena followed his lead with a pointless ground ball to second.

However, they loaded the bases AGAIN in the SECOND inning on a pair of two-out singles and a walk by Adorable J. Carroll. Asdrubal Cabrera, after watching Porcello struggle mightily with the last two hitters (Mike Brantley singled on a 2-0 pitch, Carroll drew a 7-pitch walk), swung at the first pitch. He grounded out to second.

In all, the Indians left a preposterous 12 men on base and hit 1-for-9 with runners in scoring position. At this point, if you came to my house, sliced my tongue with a petrified clam shell, and doused the wound with habanero peppers, I would still have to think about which experience was more painful.

(It's probably the peppers. Habaneros are hot, boyo. But I *would* have to weigh it.)

#### 5) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept. II

Jess Todd drives me crazy, but the man can barely drink alcohol legally, and heck, he's a Texan to boot. Is it just me, or does his [stock photo](#) make him look like Brian Giles' illegitimate brother? (Actually, Brian Giles' ACTUAL brother isn't very legitimate, but I digress.)

But as with Veras, it should be noted that after 3 DISASTROUS outings in 5 games from 8/28 to 9/12, Todd has pitched a clean frame in each of his last three outings. Three up, three down, 9 hitters retired, two by K.

I  
'm still a loooooong way from declaring Todd a "no-brainer super asset" to the 2010 bullpen, but I'm coming around to the notion that he at least should be considered part of the Opening Day roster.

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As for Raffy Perez, who also chipped in a perfect inning and has five scoreless outings in a row, I will quote the noted philosopher Chad J. Ochocinco:

*Chile, please.*

It's going to take a loooooong time for me to get over the Raffy Perez 2009 Experience.

### 6) Curtain Call

Big ups to Andy Marte, who drew a pair of walks and banged out a pair of singles in his farewell to Detroit in a Cleveland uniform. Nice game, Andy! Don't forget your fruit basket!

Oh, by the way: nice throw home, you putz.

### 7) Professional professionalism

I suppose a guy like Jamey Carroll cannot possibly find it in himself to phone in performances, but it's still nice to see a guy like A.J. draw a free pass and go 2-for-4 in a meaningless September game playing third base for a team which is obviously using the time to give PT to keeds. Carroll really is a valuable player, and I think he would add a lot more to a contender than the Nick Greens and Ron Belliards of the world. If the Indians were in a position to contend in 2010, I would definitely lobby to re-sign Carroll.

Since their rotation is so dreadful, I would like to see Carroll play for a very good team next season.

### 8) Box Score Follies

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Luis Valbuena rapped out his 23<sup>rd</sup> double of the season. This is good for 4<sup>th</sup> on the team, despite having only 333 AB, and is more than Victor Martinez, Ben Fungusco, Grady Sizemore, Travis Hafner, or Mark DeRosa produced in a similar number of PAs.

Of course, his ISO of .153 is far below that of guys like Martinez or Hafner, but it's just fine for a middle infielder.

Shin-Soo Choo pounded his 37<sup>th</sup> double of the season: he leads all Indians in extra-base hits with 59. Not coincidentally, he leads the team with a .877 OPS.

Nothing says, "We're really trying to pull this one out!" quite like finishing the game with Niuman Romero, Chris Gimenez, Andy Marte, Trev Crowe, and Sour Lou Marson on the pitch. Oh, yeah.

### 9) Human Compassion Dept.

Jeremy Bonderman. Man.