

The B-List: 9/28

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, September 28 2009 7:00 PM -

This weekend was a ray of sunshine in a dark and depressing season for the Indians, as the good guys swept the Orioles, ending a long losing streak, and ensuring the team would not lose 100 games this season. Enter John Danks. The White Sox starter was very good last night, throwing a three-hitter for the first complete game win of his career. In today's B-List, Buff hits on Aaron Laffey's last couple months, the second inning sequence that cost the Indians the game, and why Juan Veras and Jensen Lewis drive him insane.

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W: Danks (13-10) L: Laffey (7-8)



Can you believe I was excited when Juan Veras struck out Jayson Nix with the bases loaded?

1) The Cliff Lee Support Plan

Aaron Laffey fell to 7-8 on the season after absorbing the loss last night. Laffey has lost five straight decisions and hasn't won a game since 8/16, when he pitched ... worse than five of his next seven starts.

Now, look: Laffey absolutely deserved to lose a pair of 12-hit outings against Texas and Minnesota, when he was really brutally bad. His ERA ballooned from 3.36 to 4.09 in the space of 9 1/3 IP, and that doesn't include the two unearned runs he gave up.

I figured Laffey was out of gas or something, but those were bad starts.

However, in Laffey's last five starts, the Indians have scraped up a meager total of 12 runs from various couch cushions and recycle bins and generally treated him like ... well ... they "supported" Cliff Lee early in the season.

This isn't to say that Laffey was flawless in this game: he did walk another three guys, hit a batter, and gave up 8 singles in 7 1/3 innings, leaving two of his walks on base in the 8th for Veras to clean up.

On the other hand, this means that until his last inning, he'd only walked 1 batter, which is a huge and encouraging development for Laffey, who also struck out 5 guys, his highest total since August 5th

and his second-highest total this year.

(The 5:3 K:BB ratio in this game means that Laffey has now crawled up to a 1.0 K:BB ratio on the season at 55 apiece. Huzzah!)

But 4 of those 8 singles never made it out of the infield, and consider what he did after the three-run "outburst" the Sox put up in the second:

3rd: 2 Ks, GO, BB

4th: FO, 2 GO

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5th: LO, 2 GO
6th: GO, 1B, DP
7th: infield 1B, 2 LO, FO

Okay, so the lineouts in the 7th suggest that Laffey's effectiveness was waning at that point, but that's 8 groundouts in 4 innings (counting the DP as 2) before the 7th

, and 5 innings with 3 baserunners, one of whom reached on a Cleveland Bane (infield single).

That's pretty much sawing through a lineup, admittedly one that was probably more interested in seeing how ridiculous John Danks was making the offense look than padding a 3-0 lead, but a sawed lineup nonetheless.

Even in the 8th

he didn't give up a hit, he just lost his command for good with a pair of full-count walks and right-handers coming to the plate.

One thing that gets lost in discussing Laffey is just how frightening his splits are: coming from a lower arm angle, I suppose I expected a bit of a split, but righties hit .303/.384/.418 off Laffey, while lefties struggle along at a .248/.308/.316 clip. I really like the depressed power numbers in both sets: even the higher .115 ISO is pretty poor.

Even though Laffey has abandoned his Full Monty Sinker Approach, mixing in more four-seam fastballs as he becomes more confident with it, guys still don't collect a lot of extra-base hits off him.

Lefties have FOUR extra-base hits off him this season in thirty-three hits.

But a .384 OBP against righties is really very poor.

Anyway, Laffey pitched well: the runs were not so much "driven" in as "limply induced" home, but the fact is, the three single that loaded the bases were solid hits. And as we know as well as any fan base, one Inning of Crap

TM
can ruin your whole game.

He didn't necessarily "deserve better" as much as "got beaten by a better pitcher."

But it was a good game, nonetheless.

2) Hilarity at the Ballyard

Let's talk a little about the 3-run mushburst that the White Sox unleashed on the Indians in the second inning, though: after three singles, the third not struck well enough to score the runner from second, Laffey struck out Jayson Nix on four pitches for the second out of the inning. With one out, just about anything can score the runner from third, but with two outs, it will take a hit.

Brent Lillibridge strode to the plate with a .143 batting average and a .169 slugging percentage.

Brent Lillibridge is the Cleveland Browns of hitting.

He came into the game with a .419 OPS: not OBP, not SLG,
O-P-S

To face Brent Lillibridge with the bases loaded is tantamount to hitting the \$5 prize on a scratch-off lottery ticket: it's not a huge windfall, but it's almost a guaranteed profit.

Laffey's first pitch was a good one, and Lillibridge hit it weakly to third base.

However, he hit it SO weakly, SO impotently, SO Cleveland Brownishly, that the giant blooping hop appeared to fool Jhonny Peralta into thinking he was a third baseman, or perhaps a drunken beached walrus, and Peralta allowed the ball to bounce harmlessly off his glove for an "infield single." You can imagine Peralta, confused by so many options on how to get someone out (home! first! smothering infant walri with his massive bulk!), trying to throw the ball before he actually caught it, but as hard as it was to imagine Brent Lillibridge hitting an RBI single, well, the game of baseball [never ceases to amaze](#)

Unfazed by this misfortune, or perhaps more accurately COMPLETELY fazed by this misfortune, Laffey then plunked DeWayne Wise with his next pitch to produce a second run. By the way, this is a good time to mention that while Wise cannot actually HIT (.211 AVG coming into the game), at least he will swing at absolutely anything (3 BB in 132 AB, .246 OBP coming into the game).

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So hitting Wise is really just a special piece of bad pitching there.

Finally, Laffey got Gord Beckham to hit a routine ground ball to the right of the second base bag, requiring some range from Adorable J. Carroll, but really a rather routine play for either the force or the whirl-throw back to first. I mean, with two outs, take your pick. And Carroll got to the ball in plenty of time to ... loft a 9-mph Nerf

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throw to a waiting Asdrubal Cabrera to not get Wise at second base.

This was called an "infield single" because the official scorer ... well, let's be honest here.

I do not know what the official scorer is thinking at this point.

Perhaps how adorable Carroll really is.

Perhaps how it is interesting that "oatmeal" has the word "meal" right in it, how infrequently you actually make a whole meal just from oats.

Perhaps there was some last-minute action as to whether someone would punt the ball high enough to strike the Jerrytastic scoreboard at New Cowboys Stadium in the Monday Night game: ceratinly with Carolina involved, there would be plenty of punting.

Why is "cornflower" blue when corn is yellow?

What child today understands the rhyme "One, Two, Buckle my Shoe"?

Should we change it to "Velcro my Shoe" to make it resonate more strongly with the youth of today?

I digress. And so did Carroll. Because that should have been an out.

And then Laffey struck out Carlos Quentin, the one guy in the sequence I was scared of.

Huzzah!

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3) Feeble, yet weak

I don't want to take anything away from John Danks, who is an excellent pitcher. Heck, I am a Danks Homer, since he went to high school up the road from me in Round Rock, TX.

Danks sports a tidy 3.69 ERA on the season with a 1.26 WHIP and 148 Ks in 195 1/3 innings.

The Sox don't support him any better than we support Laffey, so he's 13-10 on the season, but he's a fine front-of-the-rotation starter and would be for just about anyone.

Still, seven Indians got no hits whatsoever. Here are the Tribesmen who reached base:

Adorable J.: single

Travis Hafner: error

Tofu Lou Marson: walk

Shin-Soo Choo: double, homer, general disdain for his teammates' performances

Tofu Lou (neither Sweet nor Sour) had a rather amazing night at the plate, actually: in his first plate appearance, he watched two strikes, fouled off one pitch, and watched four balls for a walk. In his second, he watched one strike and swung and missed at two others for a K. And in his third, he took three balls, fouled off one pitch, and watched two other strikes fly by for another K.

So not only did Tofu Lou not put the ball in play, he made CONTACT with TWO of SIXTEEN pitches.

That's simply ... not awesome.

And yet he was the third-most productive hitter in the Cleveland lineup.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have nothing interesting to present!

4) A Brief Interlude of Serious Praise

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Juan Veras drives me crazy in many of the same ways as Jess Todd, Chris Perez, Ferd Cabrera, and countless Guys With Stuff have over the years out of the bullpen. He doesn't throw strikes.

His ERA is unsightly.

He does strike guys out and looks like he's thiiiiis close to pulling it all together into a Raffy Betancourt sort of epiphany to become a real asset and never actually does.

So yeah, Veras drives me crazy.

And, in fact, you can argue that walking Tyler Flowers on four pitches with two outs and runners on the corners is tremendously incompetent boobery, it should be noted that he induced what could have been the inning-ending double play (they only got the guy at second) the batter before, and with a 3-2 count looming to Nix, Veras finally located strike three to get out of the inning with the bases loaded. Now, again, having Nix down 0-2 and missing three straight times to go to a full count approaches the asymptotic limit of Maddening Schmoeitude, but still, when the chips were all pushed to the center of the table, Veras got the K to end the threat.

5) We now return you to your hilarity at the ballyard, already in progress

However, Jen Lewis drives me crazy because he isn't really very good. After walking Lillibridge, which borders on the insane, and giving up a single to Wise, which borders on the impossible, Lewis allowed a two-run blasted double to Beckham, who can actually hit but should not have been up there with runners on base because Lillibridge and Wise are dreadful baseball players.

But this was not the hilarity. Pathos, perhaps, but not hilarity.

No, the hilarity came in the form of Paul Konerko singling to center with Beckham at second. With a 5-1 lead, Beckham rounded the bag and wafted, waiting to see what Trevor Crowe would do.

An excellent throw home would certainly have held him at third.

A good throw, that probably would hold him, too.

A throw to the cutoff man might even keep Konerko at first.

An execrable mockery of an off-line throw, well, empirically, I can tell you that this did NONE of these things.

Beckham ran home, stifling an guffaw, and then Tofu Lou compounded the error by throwing the ball to Not Jensen Lewis, allowing Beckham to score and Konerko to end up on THIRD.

At this point, Jhonny Peralta and Jamey Carroll met at second base and exchanged high fives, because they were no longer on the hook for making the worst defensive plays of the game.

6) Nice hose!

With Wise on first (infield single) and one out, Laffey struck out Quentin swinging on a full count.

Wise took off, and Tofu Lou gunned him down.

Pip pip!

7) Ducks off the pond

Because two, yes, TWO different Indians managed to ground into double plays (which is pretty amazing, given that only three Indians reached first base without proceeding further on the play), the Indians left two men on base and hit 0-for-1 with runners in scoring position. Getting on any one individual's case for offensive ineptitude last night seems like a fool's errand.

8) Smash-Soo Choo!

Woo woo! Choo had a homer and a double, meaning that of the 7 total bases the Indians collected last night, Choo had 6 of them. I don't think we can pin this loss on Choo.

At this point, Choo actually has a higher HR/AB ratio against left-handers than he does against right-handers: he hits a homer once every 29.33 AB against lefties and once every 30.15 AB

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against righties.

His ISO is .188 against lefties and .189 against righties.

Nice.