

The B-List: 9/30

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The Indians split a pair with the White Sox, but the real news was the performances of the starting pitchers. Fausto Carmona was excellent, and Justin Masterson topped him in the nightcap. Buff talks about these performances, makes fun of the White Sox offense, drops in a "Neener, neener," and wonders if Matt LaPorta is the slowest Cleveland Indian ever. He does not talk about Eric Wedge. **FINAL**

		1	2	3
White Sox (76-82)	0	0	0	1
Indians (65-92)	0	2	0	2

W: Carmona (5-12) L: C. Torres (1-2)

FINAL	1	2	3	4
White Sox (77-82)	0	0	0	0
Indians (65-93)	0	0	0	0

Buehrle (13-10) L: Masterson (4-10) S: Thornton (4)

And the White Sox are guaranteed a losing record! Huzzah! Also, neener neener.

1) ¡Fausto!

Let's get this out of the way: the White Sox are an execrable offensive team. Shutting down the White Sox is not entirely unprecedented and any pitching performances against them should be taken with this fact in mind.

This having been said, that was a wonderful performance by Fausto Carmona yesterday afternoon, in which he went 7 complete innings, giving up only 1 run on 5 hits. He struck out 5 and walked only 2, the second in his last inning of work, and there were several batters he brought back from the brink of walking. Fausto's second "lost season" has obviously been command-driven, so any performance in which he places some of his command and control issues aside is reason for encouragement.

Of course, throwing strikes is only part of the recipe for success, as the strikes have to be of enough quality to prevent them from being whacked hither and yon around the field, and Carmona was able to accomplish this as well. Of the five hits, only 1 was for extra bases, and although that hit was responsible for the run allowed, it was still a nice day overall. In fact, Carmona gave up singles to the first two hitters of the game: after that, he allowed only 5 more baserunners in 7 complete innings, including retiring the next 8 in a row.

2) Masterful!

Wait, why am I talking about Fausto Carmona? To paraphrase Crocodile Dundee, that's not a pitching performance. Justin Masterson ... THAT'S a pitching performance!

Now, let's get this out of the way: the White Sox are a painfully-bad offensive team. Shutting down the White Sox is not entirely unprecedented and any pitching performances against them should be taken with this fact in mind.

Still, while it's certainly true that I've questioned whether Masterson really has the necessary skills to be a legitimate starting pitcher, I have to say that that there was never a point during last night's game at which Masterson didn't look like he was in complete control of the game. Masterson induced an incredible 24 swinging strikes: he gave up 15 foul balls and 17 balls hit into play, meaning that he has nearly as many swings and misses as swings and contact of ANY kind. Many of these misses came with two strikes, as Masterson struck out 12 hitters and finished his first career major-league complete game: not bad for a guy who had to be stretched from three-inning outings just a couple months ago.

3) ¡Fausto!

Wait, we still haven't finished talking about the first game yet.

After giving up the second single in the first inning, Carmona retired the next three hitters in order, making the Sox 0-for-3 with a runner in scoring position in the first inning. For the entire rest of the game, they went 0-for-2 in such instances ... both after Dewayne Wise's run-scoring triple in the 4th inning. That means that no runner even reached second base in any of the 2

nd

, 3

rd

, or 5

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-and-beyond innings.

Carmona did this with a mix of sinkers, sliders, and fastballs with movement that resulted in a wonderfully Faustonian 12:3 GO:FO ratio, including a double play. Yes, one runner was erased on a steal attempt, but still ...

4) No, Masterful!

The White Sox tried to steal TWO bases off Justin Masterson, and it wasn't because he's got a slow delivery. It's because they couldn't muster anything off Justin Masterson and were dying for an extra base.

It's true that the White Sox actually did collect a pair of doubles off Masterson, one of which led to their only run of the game, and because of this and a couple runner-advancing groundouts, they actually got 10 ABs with runners in scoring position. Their lone hit in this situation made Masterson the hard-luck loser, as the Tribe wasn't capable of doing anything against Mark Buehrle, Tony Pena, or Matt Thornton, but

consider this sequence:

Konerko walked
Rios singled to center
Fields grounded out to SS, runners advance

Could be trouble, right? Two men in scoring position, one out?

Nix: Strike (looking), Strike (swinging), Strike (swinging)
Castro: Strike (looking), Strike (foul), Strike (swinging)

Six pitches. Six strikes. Two outs. Thanks for coming.

5) I'm telling you, ¡Fausto!

0-for-5 is better than 1-for-10, and I will tell you why:

- a) Because 0 is better than 1
- b) And because 5 is better than 10

Of course, this isn't very insightful, but the real encouragement from Carmona's outing doesn't necessarily come from the scoreless innings

or the 68 strikes in 103 pitches, a much better percentage than his median performance this season. It's more little plate appearances like this one:

Jayson Nix, 2nd inning: Ball, Strike (looking), Strike (foul), Ball, Ball, Foul, Foul, Foul, Foul, Foul, 5-3 GO

See, where the Old Fausto would have lost Nix (who isn't a good hitter, but does have an OBP-AVG of .083, so he does draw some walks) at 3-2, much less after a couple foul balls. In fact, Carmona only went to three balls on four hitters, and walked two of them. The second was in the 7th inning, up at the 100-pitch mark. Of course, it was Brent Lillibridge, which is pretty bad, because Brent Lillibridge wields a bat with the samurai skill of Tracy Jordan trying to hit cars on the interstate with a cardboard tube, declaring himself to be a Jedi. But this marks the second excellent start, and arguably the third straight start in which Carmona's command of his stuff has been superior. While this hardly overrides the indisputable awfulness of the season, it does lend itself to some belief that Carmona can be a regular rotation member in 2010 without requiring a head transplant or some sort of electroshock therapy.

6) Well, you're just wrong

0-for-5 may be better than 1-for-10, but neither of Masterson's extra-base hits allowed came with a runner on base, 1 (run allowed) equals 1 (run allowed), and 9 (innings pitched) is better than 7.

Listen, I understand that the White Sox trotted out a horrific getaway day lineup. But if you watched Masterson's stuff, every ball was moving, primarily down, and the Chicago hitters were simply scoobied by it. And if you like 68 strikes in 103 pitches, how does 80 strikes in 109 pitches grab you? That's Cliff Lee territory: in fact, Masterson's "Game Score" of 85 matches that of Lee's best Cleveland outing, a 3-0 complete game win over St. Louis; Masterson's run allowed is offset in this metric by the additional 6 Ks (Lee allowed 3 hits, 2 BB, and 6 Ks).

Interestingly enough, Masterson got only an 8:6 GO:FO ratio from his downward plane stuff. But man, that was a good start.

7) What, is this the Pitching Only show?

Did you see the offense yesterday?

Yeah, me neither.

8) Feebles flounder, but they ... well, actually, yeah, they fall down

Let's make explicit what we alluded to with respect to the White Sox lineup:

In Game 1, the first three hitters were pretty good, hitting .303, .272, and .289. After this, no Chicago hitter had a batting average over .250, and only Tyler Flowers' low-sample OBP of .350 was higher than .311. Two lineup slots were under the Mendoza Line, including the catching split of Flowers (.188) and Castro (.186).

In Game 2, one hitter had an OBP over .333, meaning that eight-ninths of the lineup reached base less than a

third of the time. Fully FIVE of the nine hitters sported averages of .225 or lower. Consider this gauntlet from 5 through 1, wrapping around in the order:

Rios: .243/.292 AVG/OBP

Fields: .222/.301

Nix: .225/.308

Castro: .178/.259

Lilliput: .153/.265

Wise: .221/.259

First off, kudos to the White Sox for finding two players less likely to reach base than Brent F*cking Lillibridge ... and then having the temerity to bat one of them LEADOFF! But second, what year is this? 1968? That, my friends, is some pretty bad hitting. Masterson was excellent (again, watch the pitches: they are high-quality), and let's not take anything away from him, but ... dude, that's a shitty offense.

9) Two Man Show

The Indians scored five runs in the first game, almost exclusively because Travis Hafner and Matt LaPorta play for the Cleveland Indians.

Hafner reached base three times on a single, a walk, and a homer, and scored all three times he reached. LaPorta reached base three times on an RBI double and two walks and scored twice while being thrown out at the plate once because the passing glacier he hopped aboard to increase his chances of beating the throw to the plate was unable to navigate a wad of gum on the third base line.

Now, of course, someone had to drive these men in (except two of Hafner's scores, in that he drove himself home once and LaPorta did the favor once as well), and this primarily fell upon Tofu Lou Marson, who whacked a single to right to score a run and also contributed a sac fly. Trevor Crowe hit a sac fly as well, although he struck out twice and I have no clever nickname for him. But if you wanted offense in the first game, you could pretty much save yourself for innings in which Hafner and LaPorta were making an appearance.

10) Whereas in the second game

There were no appearances.

11) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Mark Buehrle was terrific. I don't like ol' Moon Face because he pitches for a rival, but I appreciate a good pitching performance, and he needed only 79 pitches to get through 6 shutout innings. He did allow a double to Jhonny Peralta in the first to put runners on 2nd and 3rd (Shin-Soo Choo had singled) with two outs, but got LaPorta to ground out and stifled yawns from that point forward (1 H, 0 BB, 2 more Ks to make 3 total).

Luis Valbuena poked a pinch-hit single in the bottom of the 8th in place of Niuman Romero, who was starting because Asdrubal Cabrera tweaked a hamstring in the first game. Romero accorded himself well enough in the field, although he hits like

a tired, vertigo-stricken Brent Lillibridge.

12) Nice Hose!

Tofu Lou threw out Brent Lillibridge trying to steal.

Wyatt Toregas threw out Scott Podsednik trying to steal, although Paul Konerko was successful in his attempt. The element of surprise, perhaps?