



Hot buttered pitch!
Hot buttered pitch!
One an inning, two an inning,
Hot buttered pitch!
-- *Traditional*

0) Administrative Note

The offseason was full of activity, most of it either stressful or very stressful, but things have returned to only stressful. One development on the positive side of the ledger is that I was offered a slot in the SweetSpot Network of baseball blogs with ESPN, with the caveat that I had to have an actual baseball blog to participate. So although The B-List will remain here at TheClevelandFan.com, I will also be writing pieces for my blog at <http://swb-list.blogspot.com/> as well. You can go through the archives there to see why I am more optimistic than most about the upcoming season, although, frankly, some of the logic is better than some other set of the logic.

FINAL

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The B-List: 4/5

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Tuesday, April 06 2010 12:07 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, April 07 2010 4:37 AM

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Indians (0-1)

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White Sox (1-0)

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1) The Play™

As a long-time Division rival, I have a grudging respect for Moon Face Buehrle without actually being capable of liking him. I mean, he's a White Sok. How can you like a White Sok? Do you have a favorite flesh-eating bacterium? "I generally hate necrotizing fasciitis, but that *Vibrio vulnificus* man, I really admire its craft."

And it certainly was the case that Buehrle pitched a masterful game, holding the Tribe to three hits and a walk in seven scoreless innings. It was vintage Buehrle, with first-pitch strikes to 18 of the 24 hitters he faced, 63 strikes in 95 efficient pitches, one inning with more than one baserunner, and retiring the last 10 Indians hitters in a row. Work fast, throw strikes, win game. Credit where credit is due: Mark Buehrle can pitch.

But this is not what people will remember about this game.

In the game log, the second batter of the fifth inning says:

Lou Marson grounded out to pitcher

This is true, but only in the sense that the Romans were "somewhat rude to Carthage." Marson hit a ball back through the box ... well ... not entirely THROUGH the box ... more INTO the box, as it were. Buehrle then deflected the ball with his foot toward the first base line, sprinted toward the ball, crossing in front of Marson. Without the time to wheel and throw, Buehrle

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instead reached down with his glove, scooped the ball backwards through his legs like a running snap from center, into the waiting bare hand of first baseman Paul Konerko, and Marson was out. After this, Buehrle then performed the Heimlich maneuver on a six-year-old in the stands, saved a bag of kittens from drowning, and introduced legislation to the Illinois State Senate that would prevent anyone from running for governor with a hair-to-brain ratio greater than 1.5, which would have prevented Rob Blagojevich and made the state a better place for all. *(If only this law applied to Texas ... sigh ...)*

He then got Mike Brantley to pull the ball, which all things considered may have been the most impressive achievement of the set.

2) Jake Westerbuss

The other story on the day, of course, was Jake Westbrook umphant return to the mound. (It is approximately one-third as good as required.)

A body of generally-accepted knowledge has grown about UCL replacement surgery, also known as "Tommy John." The success rate (defined as "pitcher returns and pitches effectively") is now quite high, in the 80-85% range, and the time it takes to recover has shortened with better rehab understanding, down to about a year. Of course, the fact that 15-20% "fail" points out that no surgery is a "sure thing," and each person reacts in their own individual fashion (or fashions, if you are Chad Fox). Another common feature of coming back from UCL replacement is that "shoulders cost velocity, elbows cost command." Will Carroll of Baseball Prospectus has said in the past that command is the last thing to return, among other reasons because the proprioceptive system ("spatial awareness") has to adjust to what amounts to a new arm.

So the fact that Jake Westbrook had some command issues yesterday is hardly surprising: although it's been more than a year since his surgery, the fact is that he had two significant setbacks in June and August last summer and the clock reset a couple times on him. And it's better than Jake is missing low than high: it means his ball has sink, it just isn't a sink that knows where it's going 100% of the time. Or 95%. Or 12%.

There's no way to spin the numbers into a "good" performance. There's barely room to spin

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them into a “merely bad” performance. The man racked up 10 Witt Points (4 BB, 4 WP, 2 HBP) in four innings of play. His WHIP is 2.25 and his ERA is 11.25. He gave up a homer on the biggest, fattest meatball ever thrown by Not Tomo Ohka. Of the five hits he allowed, three were for extra bases. Although Carlos Quentin’s double before Konerko’s homer was actually a nice piece of hitting (bottom of the knee, outside corner, sinking), Westbrook had thrown his first and second pitches in about the same spot to Quentin, suggesting a certain excessive well-going. He gave up a run on a wild pitch with a man on third. He hit two batsmen, and neither was A.J. Pierzynski. That’s very bad.

However, there is a prism through which this outing can be considered Not Disastrous. I mean, C.C. Sabathia coughed up a run an inning in his opening performance, too. It’s just one start. But frankly, if Westbrook is going to miss, I’d rather it be because his ball is sinking too much than because his ball isn’t sinking enough. All four wild pitches were on balls in the dirt. He got 7 ground ball outs to 3 in the air. As Westbrook gets more reps and learns to communicate with his new arm (“Hey! The mitt! Hit the mitt, you stupid arm!”), I can see him being a valuable pitcher in 2010. Great, no. But then, that would have been greedy, so I dismiss it out of hand.

Also, Lou Marson should call for fewer Butter Pitches.

3) Nice Hose!

Speaking of Marson, although he did not exactly produce at the plate (in roughly the same manner as everyone else did not produce at the plate), he did gun down Mark Teahen trying to steal with two outs in the bottom of the second. Nice throw, Tofu Lou!

(Actually, on a day when the rest of the team averaged 3.7 pitches per plate appearance, Marson saw over 6 per PA. Judging patience by a team facing Mark Buehrle is often counterproductive, though.)

4) Ho Hum Dept.

Aaron Laffey came in with the bases loaded and nobody out in the fifth. He threw 6 strikes in 8

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pitches to lefty fraud Mark Kotsay, with the end result of ...

... a ground ball! Can you believe it?!

Of course you can believe it. It's Aaron Laffey. (And, to some extent, Mark Kotsay.)

Anyway, of all the pitchers who could easily be sent to the pen from the back end of the rotation, Laffey was a natural choice because he warms up quickly and has been successful in the role before. This makes him a better choice than David Huff, who hasn't relieved much, or Jeremy Sowers, who is bad.

Sure, a run scored on the play, and Laffey ended up walking the next guy on four pitches, but that was a bit strategic, as Rios (who walked) is right-handed, and the next hitter is left-handed (Pierzynski). Laffey attacked Pierzynski with three straight strikes, getting him to fly out on an 0-2 pitch. Laffey could be a crucial component to any success this year, especially when there isn't a single pitcher in the rotation you can reasonably expect to go 7+ innings on a regular basis.

5) Oh, no you don't!

I have seen your act before, Jensen Lewis. I have seen you be effective and post a high K rate and then you suck me in and I tout you as being a serious bullpen arm and maybe now you're ready to be a setup guy or at least a back-end arm because you have a quirky Modified Hershiser delivery and get more swings and misses than most of our relievers and then you turn into a haddock and flop around on the ground like so much aerated fish flesh and you don't even have cool sideburns any more.

No, sir.

6) Well, maybe a little

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11 strikes in 15 pitches, 2 punchouts in a perfect inning of work. Maybe ...

... No! You can't make me! Nah, nah, nah, nah, I'm not listening!

7) And now for something completely different

Alex Rios? Really? You come in to be the left-handed setup man and you give up a home run to ALEX RIOS? Who hit .199/.229/.301 as a White Sox last season? THAT Alex Rios?

Come on, Tony Sipp. 8 strikes in 9 pitches and a K is good. A home run to Weakling McSchmendrick is not.

8) Notice how little I've said about the offense

Which is more than the offense said about the offense.

9) Encouraging signs

Travis Hafner went the other way to flare a single off the lefty Buehrle, then smashed a ball to center for the final out when Rios made a very fine diving catch. An effective Hafner would go a long way.

Mark Grudzielanek stepped into the Casey Blake/Jamey Carroll role admirably with a single and helping turn a 4-6-3 DP.

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Brantley singled and ... well, no, he singled. That's it.

Shin-Soo Choo did not bite his tongue while taking a Tinfoil Hat.

10) Discouraging sign

If J.J. Putz is really back and being what Chicago fans hoped Ock Dotel was going to be, and Matt Thornton remains the hidden gem he's been, it hardly matters what Blobby Jenks does in the Nominal Closer spot: the White Sox could end up having the best bullpen in the Division (especially with Joe Nathan going SPROING!). That's bad news, because their rotation is already the best on paper. It's almost enough to offset giving Juan Pierre 700 PA at leadoff or having Mark Kotsay as your DH.