



When you out-hit a team 10 to 2, you really shouldn't need a Save.

By the way, why can't the U.N. call Hawk Harrelson to The Hague for "crimes against humanity?" No extradition, maybe? That's the only thing I can think of.

1) Tempered enthusiasm

In Spring Training, Fausto Carmona appeared to be a New Man. Or, in fact, perhaps you could argue he looked like an Old Man, if you can call his Age 23 season in 2007 "Old." It certainly seems like a long time ago. A really long time ago. I think I was a zygote at the time, doubling my number of cells with joy at every Fausto start. 2007 can be seen in the rearview mirror, but it's really really really really small.

Anyway, Carmona was good: he walked 2 guys all spring. Two! In twenty-six innings, Fausto Carmona walked TWO GUYS. That might be unsustainable, but he could QUADRUPLE that rate and STILL be way ahead of last season. His command was very good: naturally, the other numbers followed (1.38 ERA, 15 H in 26 IP, 0 HR), although of course some of these numbers

were piled up against pizza delivery boys and veterans who had been propped up, sleeping, in the batter's box in some sort of contractual obligation gesture. Spring may not be about numbers or results, but the PROCESS looked damn good. Strikes are good. Verily, yes.

So it was with no small chagrin that Carmona started off Juan Pierre, the batting equivalent of a neon tetra (looks fast, swims fast, poses no threat to an organism larger than a peach pit), with a five-pitch walk. And it was an actually large bit of chagrin that the next hitter, Gord Beckham, drew ANOTHER five-pitch walk to put runners at first and second with no outs. For those of you scoring at home, this is ten pitches, two of which were strikes.

Now, thankfully, Carlos Quentin decided to help Carmona out a bit and swung at a couple of pitches he probably should not have, and flew out to right. But after a Pierre steal of third, Paul Konerko got enough of a ball to lift it into center for a sac fly, and Carmona was instantly down 1-0 without giving up a hit. The good news here is that both Konerko and the next batter, Mark Kotsay, had two-strike counts on them when they flew out. The bad news, of course, is that nary a one of the first three outs came on the ground (Carmona's stock in trade), and he was already down 1-0 because he'd already walked two guys.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the meltdown: Carmona threw 10 strikes and 13 balls in that first inning, which was bad, to be sure. For the rest of the game, he threw 49 strikes and 37 balls, which isn't so much "good" as it is "not bad," but hey: "not bad" beats "bad."

Further, Carmona settled in to throwing both his sinker and his slider the way he wanted. What I mean by this is that he did not succumb to the temptation to "just get pitches over the plate:" instead, he threw quality pitches with movement and velocity, and didn't just spot meatballs over the center of the plate. Last season, Carmona's problem wasn't simply that he walked too many guys: he also gave up more than 1.2 hits per inning and an ISO of .170. It was a self-perpetuating (not to mention self-defeating) cycle: miss spots, walk batters, get frustrated, sacrifice quality for strikes, get pounded. In this game, sure, he missed some spots ... but he never gave up on throwing high-quality pitches. And the Sox were unable to do either "doodly" or "squat" with anything Carmona threw in the strike zone: after the first, Carmona got 10 ground outs to 4 in the air, and only gave up one hit in 6 innings.

Was it perfect? Of course not. You don't walk a guy an inning and declare Unqualified Success. 6 walks in 6 IP is atrocious and unsustainable. But whether it's Mike Redmond's influence or self-maturation or Tim Belcher or Manny Acta or the White Sox being feeble or the

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revolution in Kyrgyzstan, the 2010 Carmona pitched better than the 2009 Carmona because he kept the high quality of his stuff despite not having his best (or second-best, or third-best, or ...) command. It's not 2007 Carmona yet, but ... it looks like a step in the right direction.

2) This having been said

The pitch that Paul Konerko smashed over the wall for a two-run homer in the third was *morbidity obese*

. Wow, that was a bad pitch.

3) Meet the new boss

After much consternation about finally, finally, FINALLY moving Grady Sizemore out of the leadoff slot, Asdrubal Cabrera has stepped into the role.

In his first at-bat, he singled to right.

In his second at-bat, he singled to right.

In his third at-bat, he popped out with runners in scoring position, so that was disappointing. But in his fourth at-bat, he converted a 1-2 count into a walk.

Cabrera is now hitting .375 and, more importantly, sports a .444 OBP. He also stole a base (although he was also picked off by something named "R. Williams").

I know Cabrera SEEMS like more of the Omar Vizquel type of 2-hole hitter who can hit from either side of the plate and makes good contact, but getting a .444 OBP out of your leadoff hitter is simply excellent. Yeah, it's two games, and no, he won't finish the year with a .444 OBP, but

in terms of whether this new strategy is a good idea or not ... well ... it is.

Note: Mike Brantley could eventually grow into this role, but it would be foolhardy to thrust him there right now.▯ Cabrera is a better hitter, and Brantley needs more development.

4) Captains Clutch

In two plate appearances in which there were no runners in scoring position, Matt LaPorta grounded to shortstop and lined out to right. The lineout was encouraging in that LaPorta hit an outside pitch solidly the other way, but an out is an out.

On the other hand, in two plate appearances in which there was a runner in scoring position, Matt LaPorta stroked a hit each time. Now, he only got 1 RBI out of this because with Jhonny Peralta on second base, LaPorta's single to left advanced Peralta to ... second base ...but the second time (with two outs, no less), Shin-Soo Choo raced home from second to score the go-ahead run, allowing LaPorta to claim an ersatz "double," which truthfully was more "a single plus a fairly egregious misplay by Alex Rios." Still, it was a solid hit, and it drove in a run, and huzzahs all around.

Not to be outdone ... well, actually, to be **totally** outdone, but ... anyway, Mike Brantley was 0-for-3 with a pair of whiffaroonies without a runner in scoring position. However, with the bases loaded, one out, and down 1-2 in the count, Brantley calmly took a second ball, then stroked an RBI single up the middle to plate Cleveland's first run.

Inspired by this, Grady Sizemore put aside his 0-for-4 with a K performance with no runners in scoring position and pulled his own (2-)RBI single to right with two outs to tie the game at 3 in the 4th inning.

5) Sotto voce

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Grady Sizemore's RBI single is his only time reaching base this season. He has a .111/.111/.111 line that makes him look like a muscular Mike Rouse. I am wondering how much stock to put in the reports of "100% health."

6) Ducks on the pond!

The rest of the Indians went 0-for-8 with runners in scoring position en route to leaving 12 men on base for the game. Ten hits, 6 walks, and 2 HBP should result in more than 5 runs.

7) First-pitch strikes are overrated

Fausto Carmona started 12 of his 24 hitters with a first-pitch strike, but this isn't that unusual for a guy who put up 6 Witt Points (all BB) in 6 innings and was so inaccurate last season he was known as "The Dominican Derek Anderson." However, Aaron Laffey came in and faced 4 hitters, starting only 1 off with a strike. He was followed by Joe Smiff, who started neither of his two hitters with a strike, and finally Chris Perez, who started 1 of HIS 4 hitters with a first-pitch strike.

Laffey gave up no runs on 1 hit, inducing a double play to erase his one hit and getting all four of his outs on ground balls.

Smiff retired both hitters he faced.

And Perez got his first save with a hitless inning, posting a walk and a strikeout without letting the ball leave the infield.

8) Sotto voce II

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Joe Smiff's six pitches moved an aggregate .06 micrometers away from being perfectly straight. This does not make me smile.

9) The Kerry Wood Obsolescence Project

Am I sanguine and placid watching Chris Perez close a game? I am not. Perez' delivery has a significant amount of effort, featuring a Raffy Betancourt "ball-pump out of the glove" mid-windup, and he does not throw enough strikes to make me calm. He threw four straight balls to Mark Kotsay, and after the 2-0 count, his next two pitches appeared to be thrown with the guiding principle, "When in doubt, hump it up there even harder!" His fourth pitch flew out so high and outside Redmond had to stand to catch it. His fastball command ... well ... would be nice, I suppose. It is currently theoretical.

However, Perez' slider was magnificent. He spotted it well, and it has a nice, tight break that makes hitters look weak. Not one ball was hit with any authority off Perez.

I will say this: I felt approximately 1000% more confident after the Tribe scored an insurance run in the top of the 9th to let Perez protect a 2-run lead instead of 1-run. But Perez did a good job.

10) Flashing the leather

Andy Marte made a very fine play at first base, diving to his right to snare A.J. Pierzynski's ground ball and tossing to Perez to end the game.

Luis Valbuena showed excellent composure in gathering up Pierzynski's ground ball with Rios running near him, stepping into Rios to apply the tag, then throwing to first around Rios while still essentially in full belly-to-belly contact.

Shin-Soo Choo was able to avoid being struck in the face by not one but *two* line drives at his face. I am enthralled by Choo as a player ... but I detest watching him track balls in the air in

right field.

Hate it.

11) Terror on the basepaths!

Sure, Cabrera got picked off first immediately after nearly being picked off first. But he did steal a base, and Choo stole two off Bobby Jenks in the ninth. On his steal of second, he was standing up from his slide when the ball arrived, and the steal of third didn't even get a throw (Pierzynski had no chance). Pierzynski's a decent defensive catcher, so I'm pinning these on Jenks' slow delivery and Choo's good speed.

In that 9th inning, with the bases loaded, Marte smashed a hard-hit ground ball that forced Mark Teahen, playing "infield in" at third, to dive to his left to snare the ball. Travis Hafner stopped running on his way to third, thereby making Teahen run toward him to tag him out, and prevented helping the Sox turn a double play. (Choo, running on contact, scored easily.)

12) The Ballad of the Backup Catcher

Boy, I hope Mike Redmond is really helping Fausto stay focused or aiding Tofu Lou Marson in his development, because he sure is a terrible hitter. Great Dionysus' colostomy bag, he looks awful. He did do a fine job of being struck by a pitch, though, so good on you, mate!