

The B-List: 5/7 - 5/9

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 10 2010 2:08 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 10 2010 2:28 PM

Joe Tait used to tell me that "It's a beautiful day for baseball!" When I was a child, I thought this meant that Tait was an eternal optimist with low expectations for weather quality, while today, I think that it was an anguished exhortation to the heavens to please, just this once, would they allow him to see the Indians play Real Baseball? Please? Anyway, the weather was bad, and so were the Indians, although they didn't lose the series because one game was rained out. Huzzah!

(imaginary game deleted)

FINAL

[1

[2

[3

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8

9

R

H

E

Tigers (17-13)

0

0

0

3

0

0

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2

1

0

6

9

1

Indians (10-18)

0

0

0

1

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0

2

0

1

0

4

7

1

W: Verlander (3-2)

L: K. Wood (0-1)

S: Valverde (8)

FINAL

1

2

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Tigers (17-14)

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Indians (11-18)

0

4

0

0

1

0

2

0

x

7

10

p

W: Talbot (4-2)

L: Scherzer (1-3)

S: C. Perez (5)



Frankly, I kind of expected a Verlander-Masterson matchup to be a loss and a Talbot-Scherzer matchup to be a win. I expected David Huff to lose. Technically, the weekend ended better than I expected. So why am I still disappointed?

1) Reflections on an imaginary game

Friday's game was a miserable affair, featuring 13 runs in 4 innings and a lot of rain. After a rain delay of over 2 hours, the game was mercifully called and will be made up, probably in July.

On one level, it is a shame that the game was called: after falling behind 3-0 in the 1st and 7-1 overall, the Indians charged back to draw within 7-6 by pounding Jeremy Bonderman with 6 straight hits in the 3

rd
inning. Part of the offensive outburst was Grady Sizemore's first home run since last AUGUST and a three-run shot by Travis Hafner that would have given him homers in back-to-back games

and been part of a mini-resurgence that has seen Hafner go 9-for-23 with 3 extra-base hits (this would have been a 4

th

) to raise his average from .190 to .244 due to the magic of small samples. Over this 7-game span, Hafner has drawn 3 walks against 3 Ks and has raised his SLG from .317 to .395. There is a chance that Hafner is raising himself out of the offensive morass that envelopes most of the rest of the team: his .763 OPS, while inadequate, is a high-water mark for the young season. Sizemore ... not so much. But a homer would be nice.

On another level, David Huff was saved from yet another ignominious outing, making a third or fourth straight horrible outing depending on your tolerance for horrib. It wasn't until the second inning that he gave up a single or a walk, yet was behind 3-0 because HE GAVE UP FOUR EXTRA-BASE HITS IN THE FIRST. Three doubles and a homer later, Huff was lucky enough to strand a man in scoring position to avoid being "pummeled," settling for a mere "thrashing." Sure, it's a fine distinction, but we do what we can.

Huff has given up 7 homers in 31 1/3 IP, meaning that given 180 innings or so, he'd cough up a Blylevian 42. Giving up only 1 homer to Detroit would have been an improvement on the 3 he ceded the Twins and 2 he gifted to the Angels. Of the three doubles, exactly none was "cheap" and could easily have been homers in a smaller park or with more tailwind.

Look, it's one thing to be a flyball pitcher. There are plenty of successful flyball pitchers. David Huff is not one of them. With a GB:FB ratio of 0.61 (consistent with his 0.63 last season), Huff either needs to strike out a lot of guys (4.56 K/9 last season, 3.73 K/9 this season, the antithesis of "a lot"), get more popups, or change entirely. Cliff Lee did this (four seasons in the 0.56 range, then 0.87 in his Cy Young season; Lee's K rate was always significantly higher as well). Scott Elarton did not. Guess which one is still pitching in the majors?

Lee's tale is one that cautions that Huff's struggles in his second season to not portend a career of worthless schmoie-itude. But by golly, in the short term, David Huff sure is hard to watch.

2) Toe to Toe

A Justin Materson v. Justin Verlander start doesn't seem very promising, especially considering

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that the Tigers can actually hit and the Indians ... well ... cannot. The Tigers are actually one of the better matchups for Masterson, in that their two best hitters (Magglio Ordonez & Miguel Cabrera) are right-handed, but Cabrera in particular is so very good that handedness is largely irrelevant.

The first three innings were pretty amazing from a Power Pitching Perspective:

T1: 2 K swinging

B1: 2 K swinging

T2: 1 K looking, 1 K swinging

B2: 1 K looking, 2 K swinging

T3: 1 K looking, 1 K swinging

B3: 1 K looking

Through 3 innings, both pitchers were working on dominant shutouts with 6 Ks in 3 innings (Verlander actually set down 9 in a row). Masterson had trouble in the 4th, walking Cabrera (not really a terrible result), allowing something called "Brandan Boesch" to single (Boesch was one of the left-handers in the lineup), and Brandon Inge was able to reach on a tough ball to the hole at short. He got Alex Avila to pop out for the second out of the inning, avoiding the run for the time being. But with a 1-0 count on rookie right-hander Scott Sizemore, Masterson uncorked a fatball that Sizemore smoked for a three-run double. Really, if that pitch is an out, Masterson wins the game. Masterson was able to carry through two more scoreless innings, but the damage had been done.

Verlander was undone by a lack of control as well: two walks preceded an RBI single by Hafner, and two more runs scored in the sixth after a single-walk-infield single combo led to Austin Kearns' 2-run single.

For the game, Verlander needed 118 pitches to get through 6 innings with 8 baserunners (4 singles, 4 walks), while giving up 3 runs (largely by making a mistake with the bases loaded) and striking out 9, including 11 swinging strikes overall and 4 swinging Ks in the first 3 innings. Masterson needed 112 pitches to get through 6 innings with 8 baserunners (4 singles, 1 double, 3 walks), while giving up 3 runs (largely by making a mistake with the bases loaded) and striking out 8, including 12 swinging strikes overall and 4 swinging Ks in the first 3 innings. It was as close to being exactly the same outing as statistical noise allows.

3) Revenge of the Ordinary

As it turns out, Mitch Talbot is not Super Awesome. He is, on the other hand, still 4-2.

There's not really a whole lot to say about Talbot's outing: he didn't have his best command, and his WHIP for the game was 2.00. 4 walks in 5 IP is awful, even if one was intentional. The nice thing was that he kept the ball in the ballpark, but that's about it.

Well, actually, that's not TOTALLY it: another thing he did was get 12 swinging strikes, more than Super Pitcher Justin Verlander did against a weaker lineup (ours). And he struck out 4 in those 5 innings, his highest rate thus far (last time he struck out 5 in 8 IP). It could be that Talbot is developing more of a repertoire than I originally gave him credit for. I would gladly sacrifice Ks for fewer BBs, though. Actually, if he'd only been able to pitch to Magglio Ordonez with any success at all, he'd have had a shutout: Ordonez doubled in a run in each of the 1st and 5th

innings, drew a walk to put a runner in scoring position for an RBI single in the 3rd

, and his double in the 5th

advanced the runner on first to third where he scored on a sac fly.

Sadly, you DO have to pitch to Magglio Ordonez, so no cookie for Mitch.

4) The past meets the future and takes his cookie

Kerry Wood's return to the majors was somewhat less than a rousing success: after getting two quick outs, he walked two consecutive hitters after a double then gave up a 2-RBI single to Mig Cabrera that effectively lost the game. Giving up an RBI single to Mig Cabrera is hardly noteworthy, but walking two guys with two outs before GETTING to Mig Cabrera is pretty damned poor. If there's one thing that drives me crazy that doesn't involve a creature living in my house (cat, rodents, children), it's when relief pitchers don't throw strikes.

Given another shot at Cabrera on Sunday, Wood retired him, lowering his ERA by 9 runs.

Of course, in between, all Chris Perez did was record his fifth save on the season: after allowing the first two runners to reach base, Perez did something very few Indians fans expected of him:

He kept his composure.

One of the raps on Perez is that he does not appear to be the most mentally-tough guy on the mound. When he fails, it feels like a “snowball” thing, where misfortune gets in his head and he falls apart. Funny thing about that feeling: the evidence doesn’t actually support it.

See, his two losses came in long outings. Oh, sure, those losses were heart-rending affairs, with the Big Fat Meltdown in Detroit culminating in a walk-WP combo, and the Valbuena-Lind Affair in which the last out was not made and led to a game-winning homer. But look at the number of pitches Perez has thrown:

Five saves: 19, 13, 15, 14, 23

Two losses: 35, 29

In fact, in 10 outings of fewer than 25 pitches, Chris Perez has given up zero runs. That would be “zero.” Admittedly, this includes 2 0-out outings in which he retired no one whatsoever, but the first was still a scoreless inning (his teammates bailed him out). The second ... yeah, that was bad (4/28 against the Angels, lost the game on The Bunt Heard ‘Round the Internet). But the fact is, for all the wailing and gnashing, Chris Perez has been ... well ... pretty good. (Too many walks. Obviously.)

So why is Kerry Wood replacing Chris Perez as closer? Well, the snide person would say there are “11 million reasons,” but it’s not quite that simple. I happen to believe that Kerry Wood is auditioning for his next team: I believe that Wood was offered around but found no takers, and then he got hurt. He has to re-establish his value. And he does that by closing effectively.

Sure, this probably turns into a Cost-Saving Trade and we'll eat salary anyway, but ... yeah, this is probably the way to go about it. I just wanted to make explicit that Perez isn't so much losing his job as he is allowing Wood to parade his wares.

5) The present upstages the past and the future

On Saturday, Tony Sipp entered the game after Wood's fiasco and struck out the hitter to end the 8th. He was given the 9th, where he struck out another hitter, although he was tagged with an unearned run (thanks again, Luis!). And on Sunday, he simply struck out the side ... all three of whom hit right-handed (although one suffers from chronic Being Gerald Laird).

In Sipp's last 9 outings, he has struck out 9 hitters in 9 innings, yielding 3 hits and 1 (unearned) run. Interestingly, his GB:FB ratio is a brisk 10:8, better than you'd expect from a strikeout pitcher. On the season, he has 15 Ks in 13 IP with only 7 H. His 8 BB gum up what would be a stellar pitching line, but ... Tony Sipp can throw, man.

6) Also appearing

Aaron Laffey is quietly having an effective season out of the 'pen: with 1 2/3 innings of 1-hit ball, Laffey lowered his ERA on the season to 2.70. He could be that elusive "swing man" that most teams no longer utilize. Hey, Laffey could have sulked about being passed over in the rotation for Homer Huff or Who's That Talbot, but he hasn't appeared to let the decision affect his performance, so good for him.

Hector Ambriz gave up a hit and two walks in a scoreless inning, which is not easy to do.

7) Two True Outcomes, several False

In his last seven games, Russ Branyan has 18 AB. He has taken three Tinfoil Hats in gathering ELEVEN strikeouts. He has also walked 4 times. He has hit seven fair balls.

Think about this for a moment. If you add up all the times Branyan has walked or put the ball into play, it is the same as the number of times he has simply whiffed. If you add up all the times he has not put the ball into play and compare it to the volume of stomach acid that leaks into my abdomen through various ulcers, you get Russ Branyan Sucks.

Oh, by the way: one of the fair balls was a sacrifice bunt which led to the go-ahead run on Sunday, so he has that going for him, which is nice. How many times do you see the hulking first baseman slugger bunt? With a .200/.300/.286 line, I'm hoping the answer is "until he's traded."

8) Managerial Back-Patters

It may have been just an accident of the lineup, but I thought it was a nice touch to bring Wood back in on Sunday to face Mig Cabrera. Yeah, I did.

And calling for the bunt with Branyan directly let to the go-ahead run in a tie game. An appropriate use of the bunt, IMO, especially seeing that Russ Branyan can't hit.

9) Let's hear it for the old guy!

No, not me! Stop that!

I mean Mark Grudzielanek: I stand by my earlier sentiments that I don't particularly like Grood on this roster as currently constructed, and the man has an ISO of zero point zero, but after going 2-for-5 on Saturday, Grood came to the plate three times with a runner in scoring position Sunday and briskly went 3-for-3 in those PAs, gathering 2 RBI and a run scored. In his last 8 games, he has gone 11-for-32 to raise his average from .200 to .281. And he played a helluva lot better a 2B than Luis Valbuena did at SS in Asdrubal Cabrera's absence. Nice work.

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10) The winds of change

Andy Marte's triple (actually a tripe: it was a misplayed double, but still a wonderful blow) drove in two runs Sunday, and he added a third with a sacrifice fly. Marte is now hitting .208/.375/.417 on the season. .208 is plainly bad. .375 is actually damn good.

Let's put it this way:

Jhonny Peralta: .207/.312/.359

Andy Marte: .208/.375/.417

It is possible that Peralta's glove work at third trumps Andy's 100 points of OPS. It is also possible that my cat will begin composing sonatas on my electronic keyboard.

11) Ho Hum Dept.

Shin-Soo Choo went 3-for-7 with a pair of walks.

12) Welcome back!

Asdrubal Cabrera was back in the lineup after recovering sufficiently from a strained quad. He produced a Russ Branyan out of the leadoff slot. One is enough, Droob!