

The B-List: 5/12

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Thursday, May 13 2010 12:36 PM - Last Updated Thursday, May 13 2010 12:40 PM

Nothing like a brisk five-hour game with two rain delays and a bunch of asinine baserunning to get the blood flowing. Or coagulating. I always get those mixed up. Anyway, the Tribe won 4-0 on the strength of Fausto Carmona's ability to get out of jams, the bullpen's ability to finish strong, a couple of clutch hits, and some truly mesmerizing tactical decisions by the Royals to suck the life out of a lifeless game, which is no small feat.

FINAL

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[Indians (13-18)]

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Royals (11-23)

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W: Carmona (4-1)

L: Davies (2-2)



It was illuminating to chat online with the KC SweetSpot blogger, because he sounds ... exactly like I have in railing at his team. (He's got a better case.)

1) Weasel Power!

Fausto Carmona's start to the game was pretty remarkable: although he yielded singles to the first two hitters, the more noteworthy feature was that he didn't throw his first ball (non-strike) until the 5th hitter on his 14th pitch. He wasn't as sharp (or possibly not as aggressive, or possibly wet) later in the game, as he finished with 44 strikes in 70 pitches, but the start was really notable.

Of course, strikes are better when they aren't hit solidly, and as I mentioned, the first two hitters reached base. But then Super Trey Hillman called for Dave DeJesus to bunt, which I applauded mightily, because DeJesus has hit Carmona to the tune of .320/.452/.520 in the past. (If you're not crazy about 25-AB samples, consider that Carmona's three-year splits from 2007-9 have him holding righties to .228/.314/.330, while lefties hit a healthy .299/.375/.442.) Anyway, Bubba Butler popped up on the first pitch, and Jose Guillen grounded out (a common theme), and Carmona escaped without damage.

Inexplicably, the Royals duplicated the feat in the 4th, when a leadoff double and a HBP induced Super Trey to bunt with lefty Mitch Maier to reach righty Yoon Betancourt. First pitch? Pop out to third. Next hitter? Ground out. Déjà vu all over again.

In fact, Carmona's first 1-2-3 inning was an 8-pitch 5th with the rains starting to fall in earnest, making for an "official" game.

Special mention goes to the third inning, in which Carmona allowed a leadoff single and a 1-out walk to put two men on. Here is the pitch sequence after the single:

Aviles: Ball, Ball, F-9

DeJesus: Ball, Ball, Strike (looking), Ball, Ball

Okay, so Fausto's command is really not super excellent at this point. He throws ball one to Billy Butler. Secretly, Super Trey is sad that there is one out so he cannot have Billy Bubba bunt. Instead, he does the next best thing: on ball two, he sends the runners, and Scott

Podsednik is gunned down by Mike Oldmond. Two pitches later, Butler walks. In other words, had the runners stood like statues on their respective bases, the Royals would have had the bases loaded with one out. Instead, they had 1st and 2nd with two outs, and Guillen's whiff ended the inning.

Was Carmona excellent? He was not. He gave up 5 hits including a double, walked 2, and struck out 2 in 5 innings. His strike percentage after the first 13 in a row was 53.6%. And he benefitted from some of the most absurd, unconscionable decision-making by the Royals' "Brainless Trust" to allow no runs despite letting 7 men reach base in the first 4 innings. He induced two (two!) swings and misses. On the other hand, he posted a fine 9:3 GO:FO ratio, threw 62.9% strikes overall, and hey, 5 shutout innings is 5 shutout innings. After the 5th, the rain delay was over an hour, so Carmona's night was done after only 70 pitches: you got the impression that without the weather he could have lasted another two innings, easy.

2) Welcome back!

Coming into the game on a brisk 0-for-13 streak, Asdrubal Cabrera struck out and flied out his first two trips to the plate. In the 5th, the Indians put the first two runners on with a pair of singles.

Mike Oldmond sacrificed the runners to 2nd and 3rd.

Now, after railing against the technique above, you might think that I am compelled to hate this maneuver as well. It would be hypocritical to say that I hated the bunts that didn't work while I loved the bunt that did. But this overlooks a crucial point: Mike Oldmond isn't a very good hitter.

See, one factor in hating the bunts KC coughed up was that Super Trey took the bat out of a left-handed hitter's hands and handed it to a right-handed hitter, and one of them was Yoon Betancourt. That's just foolish against Fausto Carmona. Here, though, Manny Acta is taking the bat out of the hands of the guy hitting .229 with a sore hip and giving it to the guy hitting .291. Granted, Cabrera was on a massive cold streak, but ... y'know, I kinda liked the subliminal message here, too: "You're our guy, Drooby, go get a hit."

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Anyway, Cabrera lined a two-run single into center and later added a second hit. Perhaps this will snap him back into Productive Mode, which would be a Good Thing.

3) Russ smash!

Let me say this about a Russ Branyan home run: it is rarely cheap. There are no leaping outfielders, stretching in vain to catch the ball barely clearing the wall. There are fans in seats far away scrambling for a souvenir.

With one out in the 6th inning, Branyan blasted his 3rd home run in two days off Brad Thompson, whose stock photo could not look goofier if he were wearing an Oscar Meyer weiner suit. It travelled a listed 427 feet and ended the scoring at 4-0.

Look, Branyan is a streaky hitter and will go through more stretches of Tinfoil Hats than he will a bomb a day. He is what he is. That doesn't mean it's not valuable, so enjoy it while it lasts.

4) Terror on the Basepaths!

Podsednik's folly offset the fact that he'd stolen second before DeJesus' walk. But the Indians ... oy gevalt.

First, with two outs in the 3rd, Grady Sizemore tried to steal second and was thrown out by Jason Kendall, who remembers the introduction of Pop Rocks and also when he had functional legs. Then in the 8th, with one out and a full count to Austin Kearns, Travis Hafner ... TRAVIS HAFNER! ... was caught stealing on a "strike 'im out throw 'im out" double play.

I understand the element of surprise, but on a wet field, you have this guy on first:

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2007: 1 SB, 1 CS

2008: 1 SB, 1 CS

2009: 0 SB, 0 CS

The only guys I want to see sent less than Travis Hafner are Mike Oldmond, Matt LaPorta, and Jhonny Peralta. I would rather Manny pinch-run for Hafner and steal.

Not a fan.

5) Son of Weasel Power!

Aaron Laffey started the game after the second rain delay, and generally threw strikes, giving up one harmless hit in his first inning of work. In his second inning ... oh my.

First, he walked Yoon Betancourt, which is nigh impossible. Fortunately, he got Scott Podsednik to ground into a double play (which is also pretty hard: Pod is still fast). This was good, because he gave up a single and a walk before yielding the floor to Chris Perez.

C-Pez gave up a single to Butler to load the bases. No shame there, Butler is hitting .328 and took a good pitch the other way. Faced with the prospect of the tying run as Jose Guillen, Perez eschewed his slider and simply threw heat over the belt. This is good scouting, because while Guillen can still punish some thing, high heat (especially inside) is not one of those things. Three swinging strikes later, the inning was over.

After a double and a 1-out walk, Perez calmly dispatched Betancourt on three pitches, then got Pod to pop out.

6) A contrast in styles

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Whereas Tony Sipp simply dispatched the Royals in order, throwing 7 strikes in 8 pitches.

7) Box Score Follies

Cleveland pitchers' ERAs:

Carmona: 3.43

Laffey: 2.45

C. Perez: 2.31

Sipp: 1.93

I mean, that's just neat to look at.

8) Everybody hits!

Well, everyone but Oldmond: every other Tribe hitter had at least a hit. Cabrera, Brayan, and Peralta each had two, and Hafner and Grudzielanek added a walk each to their hits to reach base twice as well.

The only KC hitter not to reach base was Guillen, who went 0-for-3 with runners in scoring position. As a team, KC went 1-for-10, and the hit didn't produce a run (obviously). They left 13 men on base, and that doesn't count runners erased on a caught stealing and a GIDP.

That's pretty special.

For the record, the Indians went 1-for-3 with a runner in scoring position, which ... I mean, wow. Three? That's it? We were kind of lucky to win, no?