

The B-List: 5/17

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Tuesday, May 18 2010 1:01 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, May 18 2010 1:12 PM

The Tribe wastes Fausto Carmona's excellent start to lose a game on a game-winning bunt. In today's B-List, Buff practices the fine art of second-guessing, laments the loss of our starting shortstop, takes cheap shots at washed-up players, covets Tampa Bay's bullpen, points out the similarity between Shin-Soo Choo and Travis Hafner, and ultimately wonders what exactly Cleveland is expecting from a game in which Jamey Wright is handed the keys. The Jason Donald Era begins in Tampa today: let's hope it kicks butt on the Niuman Romero Era.

FINAL

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Royals (27-11)

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W: Sonnanstine (1-0)ⓅⓅⓅ L: J. Wright (1-2)



I swear, if you win because of Hank Blalock, you are charmed.

1) Shake it off!

In the span of the first three hitters, Fausto Carmona was down 2-0 on a single-triple-single parlay. After two out, Hank Blalock got an infield single for a 4th hit, but was stranded when John Jaso grounded out.

Fausto Carmona gave up five hits.

Once he got rid of that opening-inning jitter, Carmona proceeded to retired nine in a row, then walked B.J. Upton, then retired eleven in a row. Carmona didn't exactly pound the strike zone, but he was in it enough to strike out 7 hitters, get 11 swinging strikes, and walk only one batter (Upton). After that initial flurry of the first three hitters, Carmona essentially pitched about as well as he's capable of pitching.

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Consider his line after the first three hitters:

6 2/3 IP, 2 H (singles), 0 R, 1 BB, 7 K

I mean, that's a terrific start.

Now, of course, you don't get to lop off the first three hitters of the game, and the fact is, he WAS behind 2-0 after the first inning. On the other hand, this didn't appear to rattle him much, as evidenced by the line above. The 7 strikeouts are obviously aberrant (season high to this point: 4), but on the other hand, it does get him back to the "plus" side of the K:BB ledger at 26:21.

In fact, consider this: Carmona has given up 44 hits in 51 1/3 innings. He has given up as many or fewer hits as innings pitched in 6 of his 8 starts. He has 6 Quality Starts in 8, and in one of the non-QS starts, he was lifted after 5 shutout innings because of a 70-minute rain delay.

Most impressively thus far, a rap on Carmona (besides his control and low K-rate) is that his power sinker stuff doesn't necessarily play well against left-handed hitters:

2007: .275/.332/.377

2008: .303/.387/.444

2009: .331/.425/.537

2010: .244/.272/.302 (before last night's game)

The increase from 2007 (super) to 2009 (super ... atrocious) can be explained in large part by this inability to retire left-handers. And for a sinker groundball guy to give up an ISO of .206 to ANY subset of hitters is just unconscionable.

I don't know how much of a role Mike Oldmond plays in Fausto's resurgence, and honestly, between you and me, he isn't going to hold lefties to a sub-.600 OPS. He's good; he's not

THAT good. Amongst a better “trusting of the stuff,” some measure of improved command, and a willingness to mix in a changeup, SOMETHING is working against lefties this year, which is helping a lot.

2) You know what else is helping a lot?

Tampa is hitting .216/.285/.321 in May as a team. I mean, this is arguably the best team in the A.L., maybe even the majors, but boy howdy, they sure are cold.

3) Okay, well, you DON'T shake it off

With one out and the X-Treme shift on for ... HANK BLALOCK ...

... I'm sorry. Look, I have been getting a healthy ... nay, an UNhealthy dose of Hank Blalock over the years, and I'ma tellina yoo, that boy is fading bad. Heck, he's EMBRACING bad. To replace Pat Burrell with Hank Blalock is like replacing Warren Harding with Ulysses Grant. Other than eyebrow density, what have you really changed?

Okay, I'm back now. Anyway, Blalock is a dead pull hitter, so Jhonny Peralta moved to “short” and Asdrubal Cabrera moved to the first-base side of second. On a ball hit up the middle, the two players went for the ball with varying degrees of grace (some for Cabrera, a “Fantasia” hippopotamus amount for Peralta), and Blalock was credited with an infield single.

This wasn't the important part of the play, though: the IMPORTANT part is that Cabrera broke his forearm (or, to be more precise, “Peralta broke Cabrera's forearm”) and may require surgery. I don't know a ton about broken bones, but I am going to go out on a limb here and suggest that if you've broken a bone badly enough to consider a surgical option, this is not something you rub dirt on and play through.

And, indeed, Cabrera did not. It remains to be seen how long he'll be out, but I have to think

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that 6 weeks is a minimum for a broken bone heavily involved in the hitting process (Cabrera is a switch-hitter as well, so it's BOTH hitting processes). Thus begins the Jason Donald Era. With Andy Marte on the DL, this makes your infield:

Jhonny Peralta, Jason Donald, Luis Valbuena, Mark Grudzielanek, Subcompetent First Baseman

I guess what I'm saying here is ... that's just not a good infield.

4) The early Squander Ball matches nicely with the late Nothing Ball

Jeff Niemann came into the game with a sparkling ERA under 2.50, but was not at his sharpest against the Tribe. In the second inning, Austin Kearns' double turned into a run on Jhonny Peralta's single, and Oldmond was able to go the other way once again for a single that put Peralta on third. However, this came to naught more as Trev Crowe grounded out back to the pitcher.

In the third, Luis Valbuena and Kearns worked walks around Travis Hafner's double, loading the bases for Russ Branyan, who ... popped out to third.

Let me say this: I'm sure Bake Zobrist has a fine throwing arm in right field, but a guy like Mark Grudzielanek really ought to score on a double to the wall.

Anyway, he didn't.

And then double plays in the 4th and 5th ended scoring opportunities: although the Tribe would pull ahead in the 6th after Jhonny Peralta's second triple of the season, the Indians were thoroughly scoobied by the Tampa Bay bullpen, and never did anything again. And they all laid on the ground, waving their arms and legs in the air like dying cock-a-roaches. The end.

5) Scary, scary man

Joaquin Benoit is not the greatest relief pitcher in the world: he'd spent eight years in Texas, first as an ersatz starter (ERAs: 5.32, 5.49, 5.68: this is bad even in Texas), then as a power reliever (K/9 of 8.3, 8.2, 9.6, 9.6, 8.6). He didn't pitch in the majors last season, but Tampa pounced on him on a minor-league deal, and brought him up. Here is what Joaquin Benoit did last night:

Kearns: K swinging
Brayan: K swinging
Peralta: K swinging
Oldmond: K swinging
Crowe: K swinging

Admittedly, this is not exactly Murderer's Row, but it isn't the Mike Rouse All-Stars, either. Benoit threw 16 strikes in 19 pitches, and the Indians swung and missed at EIGHT of them.

We signed Jamey Wright and Saul Rivera. Just sayin'.

6) Shameless post hoc analysis

Aaron Laffey got the last out of the 7th, then stayed in to face lefty Carl Crawford in the 8th. Crawford promptly doubled, and Chris Perez was summoned to face the right-handed Evan Longoria.

Now, on the surface, this is a fine move. And, truth be told, C-Pez is supposed to be a guy who gets EVERYONE out. If he can't get all kinds of batters, he's not really a back-end reliever. Sure enough, he got Longoria to whiff and induced an opposite-field flyout from Carlos Pena. With two outs, Hank Blalock hit the inconceivable game-tying single, and we ultimately lost the game.

Now, let's put aside the absurdity of giving up the game-tying hit to Hank [F*#@#ing Blalock](#). I mean, look: Chris Perez has to be able to get Hank Blalock out. That's not too much to ask. Yeah, he's a professional hitter, but you have to get him out there. Have to.

But going back, isn't part of the point with Laffey that he's a multi-inning guy? In a tight ballgame, playing an opponent with like umpty-four late-inning come-from-behind wins, is it really that great an idea to burn this guy after one out? Walk Longoria and set up the DP for lefties Pena (who has a BIG platoon split) and Blalock (who doesn't historically have a big split, but developed on in the last coupla years). Anyway, that leads to burning Perez, which leads to burning Sipp, which leads to burning Wood, which leads to Jamey Wright pitching important inning(s).

7) A game of inches

Of course, this whole analysis is rendered pointless and rude if Trevor Crowe's diving effort on Blalock's game-tying hit had resulted in an out. The ball looked like it hit the webbing, but couldn't survive Crowe hitting the ground with his chest. It would have been a great catch. In fact, at real speed I thought he DID make the catch. But ... no.

8) The bunt of death

No complaints on this one, mostly because there weren't two outs. I think Perez was most horked-off by the Angels' version because there were two outs, and the batter has to be safe: in this case, they didn't even give Bartlett an at-bat, calling it a pure "sacrifice."

Anyway, with runners on first and third, Bartlett pushed the bunt to almost precisely the same place as the one that scoobied Perez, except Jamey Wright actually pounced on it. Still, it was good enough that Wright's rushed throw was Saltalamacchian, and John Jaso scored. Note: Jaso would have been out, out, *out* had Wright been able to field the ball cleanly.

9) Things you wished you hadn't noticed

We put a brave face on Travis Hafner's numbers, but really, they're a poor substitute for those he put up in the past. I mean, the man is in the Tyner Zone again after a walk, single, and double, which is a pretty damned fine night. Hafner stands at .262/.396/.393 on the season: the .396 is obviously tasty, but the .393 is kind of poor from your DH and a .131 ISO is somewhat low-wattage.

Shin-Soo Choo is hitting .292/.401/.431.

So, for all the praise I've heaped on Choo and all the tongue-clicking sympathy I've had for the Artist Formerly Known as Pronk, they have ... kind of the same OBP and SLG. Choo's ISO is .139.

Um ... yeah.