

I'm not sure how much "analysis" there is to analyze here: the Indians were shut down by the starting pitcher with the sub-2.00 ERA, meaning he has shut EVERYONE down and this is not news. David Huff gave up 2 baserunners an inning and lost, which is not news. The Tribe couldn't come back against the best bullpen in baseball, which is not news. Russ Branyan struck out, which is REALLY not news. Jason Donald's debut was excellent, which is as close to news as we get. I cannot write 2000 words on Jason Donald.

FINAL

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The B-List: 5/18

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, May 19 2010 1:20 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, May 19 2010 1:27 PM

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Indians (15-22)

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Rays (28-11)

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W: Price (6-1) *L: Huff (1-6)*



So ... um ... yeah.

1) Fair, balanced, and annoyed

It's easy to ridicule David Huff's performances: Lord knows I've certainly played my part. And on the surface, this is just another one of those outings, getting knocked out after retiring neither of the two batters he faced in the 6th, already at 103 pitches, with 7 hits and 3 walks making for a nice, round 2.00 WHIP for the game (which doesn't even count the HBP), giving up 3 runs, posting a "backwards" 2:3 K:BB ratio, and losing the game. Ho hum, right?

And even if we note that 3 runs in 5 innings actually represents a significant improvement over his previous four starts, an ERA of 5.40 instead of 7.77, it's still just not very good.

However, it's time to take a different approach in evaluating the job David Huff does in any given start. I wrote [this piece](#) last night talking about the [Posnanski Treatise](#), in which Joe talks about how a non-contending team in a smaller, less-rabid market should be taking advantage of the opportunity they have with respect to time. That is, such a team (like his Royals) should be doing two major things:

- a) Give young somewhat-experienced players the playing time that allows them to develop skills and resilience: in short, don't be afraid to let them fail
- b) Give young inexperienced players the playing time that allows you to properly evaluate whether they can contribute to the next winning team

His archetype of the former is Luke Hochevar, who was allowed to lose a game in order to develop the ability to work out of trouble. This may or may not ever happen, but the potential payoff greatly outweighs the cost of One Loss in a 90-loss season. His archetype of the latter would be Kila Ka'iahue, who may or may not be a legitimate major-league slugger, but the question is literally unanswerable with the data the Royals currently have.

So, with this in mind, the question becomes twofold: do we have enough data to know what we really have in David Huff, and are there things he should be using his time in the majors to address specifically? I claim the answer to the first part is actually, "No," although I cheerfully admit that it SEEMS like he's had plenty of time because I hate watching him pitch. He hasn't had "plenty of time." He has 30 starts in his ENTIRE MAJOR-LEAGUE CAREER. They're not a very good 30 starts, but don't make me conjure up any number of examples of Very Good

Pitchers who had bad stats in their first 30 starts. Take this point on faith. As for the second ... look, I'm no pitching coach. I have little idea what Huff works on NOW. I know what he currently DOES produces lousy RESULTS, but I can't tell you if this is permanent or part of a process or any point on that spectrum.

Instead, let's focus on the results I dislike and see if yesterday's game tells me anything about how he might be addressing them. First, he gave up too many homers and extra-base hits in general (but even trading homers for doubles would help significantly). Yesterday, Huff allowed 5 singles and 2 doubles, and one was to Evan Longoria, who slugs .596. That isn't bad. This was only his second homerless start in seven. And 7 hits is actually the fewest he's allowed in his past four starts. Again, Tampa is in sort of an offensive slump, but that's an improvement.

How did he accomplish this? Well, first off, he attacked hitters. The first two hitters started in an 0-2 hole and each of the three hitters saw a first-pitch strike. After getting to three balls on three of the first four hitters, he did not throw any of those hitters a 4th ball, including three to Jason Bartlett (two fouls), two to Beck Zobrist (one foul), and two to Carlos Pena (one foul). Along with three fouls of 2-2 offerings to Gabe Kapler, Huff looked like he was attacking the strike zone with some degree of aggression. And really, his first two innings were superb in terms of results: one single, six outs. He's not walking a tightrope here, he's pitching pretty well.

In the 3rd, walking Sean Rodriguez on five pitches is simply unconscionable. Sean Rodriguez at the plate is Tampa's answer to Tofu Lou Marson. He doesn't hit well, and with the bases empty, there is just no reason not to throw him a strike. Of course, Rodriguez scored the first run of the game after a single and a double, but the damage was limited when Huff struck Willy Aybar out on three pitches with the bases loaded.

He got a double play from Rodriguez (see?) to end one inning and worked around an infield single and a walk in another: none of these are crushing blows. And he ended up getting charged with two runs because Chump Ambriz imploded: the double to Upton was blasted, but he hit Gabe Kapler trying to pitch inside. Pitching inside is something that Manny Acta had challenged Huff to do: at the 105-pitch mark, he just missed. He wasn't anxious, he just pulled it.

So, Huff needs to work on pitching inside, and he pitched inside. He needs to work on keeping the ball in the park, and he kept the ball in the park. He had a mental lapse to Rodriguez and got beaten by a superior hitter (Longoria) and a capable one (Upton). Sounds very much like a

guy working on the Posnanski Plan.

Last point about Huff, though: hitters swung and missed at 7 pitches while fouling off 18. His first two innings were greatly extended by two-strike foul-offs. He still has a lame-assed 16:16 K:BB ratio in 42 innings. So the next thing to work on is something hitters will actually miss, whether that be a cutter, a slow curve, or maybe a different straight change that moves laterally.

Consider this: Cliff Lee did not truly harness excellent command on his fastballs until 2008, his fifth full season. Although I'm not excited by the prospect of waiting that long for Huff, I will say that 30 starts is an unreasonable expectation.

2) The Treatise as applied to Hector Ambriz

Are we sure his nickname is "Chip?" I don't think it's really "Chip."

Chump Ambriz came into a high-stress situation with runners on first and second and no one out and promptly took the sacrifice from Dioner Navarro. This is a good play from Navarro, who cannot hit. There is a reason pitchers sacrifice in the National League. Navarro hits worse than San Diego pitchers.

After this, Ambriz gave up a run-scoring groundout: these things happen. He had him 2-2 with a swinging strike, and Reid Brignac simply did a good-enough job. No big deal, at least there are two outs with one run in.

And then after an 0-2 count, Ambriz gives up a flare to Bartlett that wafts over Jason Donald's glove at short, and Ambriz turns into a newt. Bob Zobrist singles to put runners at the corners, and Ambriz tries to muscle a high fastball past Evan Longoria, which is probably the worst idea I can imagine except giving the Nobel Prize in Economics to Greek Banks. Longoria's triple drove in two runs and that was effectively the end of the game.

Now, rationally, this is giving Ambriz a high-leverage tryout and giving him the experience of getting through a rough patch. The single by Bartlett could very well have been the third out if hit slightly lower, and hey, you want to (a) find out what you have and (b) develop this skill (getting out of a jam). This is Posnanski's Hochevar example writ large.

It sucked, though. Let's hope he learned not to throw a guy like Longoria a pitch like that.

His next inning involved an infield single, two walks, a stolen base, a passed ball, a wild pitch strike three, and a lucky break. I'm not sure there IS anything to learn from THAT.

3) Dept. of Raffies

How can you strike out the right-handed Longoria and then give up a single to the left-handed Pena when Pena has a big platoon split? Honestly, I don't even want to acknowledge Raffy Perez pitches at this point.

4) Welcome to the club!

Ja-son Don-ald
(clap, clap, clap-clap-clap)

After Jason Donald's first major-league plate appearance, his career line stood at 1.000/1.000/1.000. After his second major-league PA, it stayed 1.000/1.000/1.000. After his THIRD major-league PA, it was STILL 1.000/1.000/1.000. Only after finally grounding out in the 9th did his career OPS drop below 2.000.

I'm gonna go out on a limb and predict that Jason Donald will not hit .667 for his career, but he sure wasn't intimidated by playing on the road against David Price. One single went to center, and the other went to right (Donald bats right-handed), so he's using the whole field. And he drew a walk, although that was more a function of Dan Wheeler throwing poorly to his first

batter than any great savvy batting skill.

With Asdrubal Cabrera out probably until July, we should see quite a dose of Mr. Donald, Mr. Valbuena, or both. So it's nice to get a couple of hits under his belt before meeting the home crowd.

5) Pronk clutch!

Well, I mean, as clutch as one gets in a 6-2 game, but the Indians went 1-for-10 with RISP, which is a function of both the Indians' hitters and the Rays' bullpen. The one hit? An RBI double from Travis Hafner off Grant Balfour to drive in Jhonny Peralta, who had doubled immediately before. Way to go, Pronk!

6) Everyone else

Not so helpful.

7) Tautology Dept.

Russ Branyan struck out. (Swinging on four pitches, variety 3-B.)

8) For completeness' sake

Matt LaPorta had a single and two walks to be the other Indian (other than Donald) to reach base more than once.

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Mike Redmond has a higher OBP than Russ Branyan.

Mike Redmond's OBP is bad.

Trevor Crowe and Mark Grudzielanek saw a combined 49 pitches in 10 PA out of the first two lineup slots.

Jamey Wright pitched.

Mark Grudzielanek and Jason Donald have the same isolated power (ISO).