



The "Battle of Ohio" goes much the way of the Browns-Bengals tilts of recent years, with the Reds taking two of three. The offense wasn't exactly BAD, it just wasn't actually GOOD. The pitching wasn't really BAD, it just wasn't really any GOOD. And the defense ... well, not all defense is created equal. The Indians balance a comeback that fell just short with a save from Kerry Wood, and Buff claims, much in the manner of Mark DeRosa last year: the time to buy is NOW. Don't delay! Operators are standing by!

FINAL

1

The B-List: 5/21-5/23

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 24 2010 2:46 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 24 2010 2:54 PM

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

R

H

E

The B-List: 5/21-5/23

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 24 2010 2:46 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 24 2010 2:54 PM

Reds (24-18)

0

0

1

3

0

2

0

0

1

7

10

The B-List: 5/21-5/23

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, May 24 2010 2:46 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 24 2010 2:54 PM

0

Indians (15-25)

1

0

0

0

3

0

0

0

0

The B-List: 5/21-5/23

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 24 2010 2:46 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 24 2010 2:54 PM

4

8

p

W: Arroyo (4-2)

L: Laffey (0-1)

S: F. Cordero (14)

FINAL

1

2

3

4

5

6

The B-List: 5/21-5/23

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, May 24 2010 2:46 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 24 2010 2:54 PM

7

8

9

R

H

E

Reds (25-18)

2

0

0

2

The B-List: 5/21-5/23

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 24 2010 2:46 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 24 2010 2:54 PM

1

0

1

0

0

6

12

0

Indians (15-26)

0

0

0

The B-List: 5/21-5/23

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 24 2010 2:46 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 24 2010 2:54 PM

0

0

2

0

0

2

4

9

3

W: Cueto (4-1)

L: Carmona (4-2)

The B-List: 5/21-5/23

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 24 2010 2:46 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 24 2010 2:54 PM

FINAL

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

R

H

The B-List: 5/21-5/23

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, May 24 2010 2:46 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 24 2010 2:54 PM

E

Reds (25-19)

2

0

0

0

0

1

0

0

0

The B-List: 5/21-5/23

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 24 2010 2:46 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 24 2010 2:54 PM

3

7

p

Indians (16-26)

2

0

1

0

0

1

0

0

X

4

9

p

W: Huff (2-6)

L: D. Herrera (0-2)

S: K. Wood (1)

You know, technically, two of the three games came down to the wire, with the losing team stranding the tying run on base in the final inning. And yet ... bona fide *excitement* was somehow in short supply. Also, D-Ray Herrera is short.

1) Administrative Note

I try to resist the inclination to write about things that ought to stay personal in this column. I mean, I have no hesitation to teach everyone “The Good Morning Song” or talk about bad children’s television shows: those things are silly and harmless. You should not sing “The Good Morning Song” at your office, mind you, but this isn’t much of a window into my soul, so to speak.

So without a lot of detail into the back-story that makes this especially relevant to me, let me say

that it has been easy over the years to poke fun or root against Milton Bradley. Bradley performed well for the Indians, yet it seemed that few, if any, were upset at the prospect of his departure. This conflict was not limited to the Indians, either: there are reasons that Bradley is a well-travelled athlete.

However, I will not be doing this today. Instead, I will be encouraging Mr. Bradley, applauding his frankness and openness, and appreciating the efforts of his teammates (notably Mike Sweeney) to help Bradley work through his current situation. I would encourage him to take advantage of the resources at his disposal, and to allow those close to him to help him recognize that his worth as a person is not solely defined by his performance on the baseball diamond. Here is an intelligent, thoughtful, and physically-gifted man who has taken care of his family in a way only a small percentage of people have, and I exhort him to do whatever is necessary to regain a healthy, constructive perspective on his life. Best wishes, sir.

2) Bombs away!

So, listen: if you're a sinkerball pitcher, you know, the ball is supposed to ... I dunno, how should I put this ... just brainstorming here ... maybe it should go DOWN.

Now, being a low pitch does not guarantee the ball will be hit on the ground: heck, even downward movement doesn't *guarantee* anything. David Ortiz, for example, has that lovely golf swing that can take a pitch off his shoetops up into the air. Russ Branyan has that lovely golf swing that misses the ball entirely. But practically speaking, pitchers like Jake Westbrook and Fausto Carmona are going to be more effective when their offerings have late movement down, giving the batter little time to adjust his swing and resulting in the ball being struck at a downward angle.

Of Westbrook's 7 hits allowed, four of them were for extra bases, including a pair of homers by Laynce Nix (who also hit a double: career SLG: .429) and Jonny Gomes (strong man, not known for swinging with eyes open). His 6:5 GO:FO ratio was not very good, suggesting that his pitches weren't moving with the sharpness he's had in his last couple of starts. He did get 10 swinging strikes and 3 Ks, but that doesn't overcome the simple poundery Westbrook absorbed.

As for Carmona, there are times when an “unearned run” is kind of cheap. For example, if an error is made with two outs, any subsequent runs scored in that inning are “unearned,” even if it would probably be more reasonable to “roll those hitters over,” considering them to be starting the next inning or something. Look, you give up 5 solo shots in a row after a guy boots a two-out grounder, those shouldn’t be “unearned runs.” I hate the concept of an “unearned homer.” The man pounded the ball over the wall. It’s your fault.

In Carmona’s case, though: the two unearned runs were fairly unearned. In the first, Trevor Crowe’s preposterous throw allowed Joey Votto to move up a base and score on a single: had Crowe simply devoured the ball on the spot, that run would not have scored. And Bran Phillips’ smallball run (error, steal, advance on groundout, sac fly) was hardly due to Carmona giving up any, you know, **base hits**.

On the other hand, Carmona was able to give Nix a homer as well and gave up a double to the Muffin Man for a pair of extra-base hits. From the game writeup:

"Fausto had a hard time getting the ball down," manager Manny Acta said. "His slider was a little flat. Those left-handed hitters made him pay."

Nix, Bruce and Joey Votto went 5 for 8 with a walk against Carmona.

So, yeah. That’s pretty bad. We talked a bit about left-handed hitters against Carmona last time: suffice it to say, Carmona may not be completely helpless against lefties in the manner of, say, Justin Masterson, but he DOES have to have at least average stuff (as defined in Carmonan terms) to retire lefties. Without it, he’s going to struggle. Still, he did finish a 6th inning and posted a 4:2 K:BB ratio, a mark that keeps moving the needle in the right direction (if nothing else).

3) Using the wake-up call to wake up

I give David Huff a lot of grief, because David Huff’s pitching gives me a lot of grief. Generally speaking, I hate it, which grieves me. Oh, for the halcyon days of Chris Nabholz and Dave Otto!

Wait, no, while Huff is here, those days are front and center.

Okay, that's not entirely fair, but Huff's pitching is not entirely good, either. Still, it bears mentioning that since the Woodshed Monologues from the Kansas City disasterpiece, Huff has managed to put together a couple nicer starts in a row. In this one, for example, Huff completed a 6th inning (in 97 pitches, so it's not like he was pushed hard to get there), something he hadn't done since April 21st. He didn't give up more hits than innings pitched, which also last happened April 21st. He struck out a season-high 4 batters (okay, sure, it's FOUR, but hey) and only walked one.

The dark cloud within the silver lining was the fact that Huff got tatory with his bad self and coughed up a pair of homers to the time traveller inhabiting Scott Rolen's desiccated husk. The second pitch was so thoroughly bad Huff was shouting expletives at it before it reached the plate, much in the manner of a golfer hitting an errant fairway wood. (It was a changeup that hovered near Rolen's belt over the middle of the plate: the only question was whether Rolen would be temporarily blinded by the flash of light reflecting off the silver platter that accompanied the pitch.) It is to Huff's credit that he did not give up any runs on balls not hit by Scott Rolen's doppelganger over the wall, but ... if taterosity is one of the issues you need to address to be successful, then giving up gopherballs is kind of an issue.

Still, Huff hit his spots better, using a fastball that appeared to be at least major-league in quality, and moving the target on the hitters to include inside and outside locations. It wasn't a great start, but it was a Quality Start, and objectively the best from an Indians starter this weekend.

4) Lobbying for expansion

MLB has an odd league structure, with 14 teams in one league and 16 in the other. Part of the problem is that neither number is a multiple of 3. Part of the problem is that interleague play is apparently good enough to justify skewing the schedules of Wild Card contenders in ways both predictable and unpredictable, but not good enough to justify a series every day to accommodate 15 teams per league. But another problem is the simple fact that although it would be nice to have 16 teams in each league, there just aren't that many places to put an expansion team. Sure, fans in Portland or Charlotte or even New York (getting a third team, as they had in the first half of the 20th century) will tell you this is misguided, but let's face it: leagues seek to maximize revenue, and if the model would support expansion, expansion would

be done.

Here, though, I have a more elegant solution. We can have a new team, based in Cleveland, that actually *plays its games during Indians games*. It would save on travel. It would not require the construction of a new stadium. All it would require is the complete and thorough gutting of a once-proud franchise.

Here is my proposal: allow the new expansion team to consist of Shin-Soo Choo, Tony Sipp, and Chris Perez. I don't have a permanent name for the new franchise: I am thinking, "The Talented Players of Cleveland." You know, like the Mighty Ducks of Anaheim, the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, or the Tortured Analogies of Anaheim.

Give the new franchise any random 22 people in the city in which they're playing. Allow the Indians to call up 3 replacements from the 40-man roster. The new team would win more often than the old one.

Problem: do I write two columns? I know which column would be longer.

5) Theory and Practice

A number of Cleveland hitters had a hit this weekend, and a decent number had two hits in a game: Russ Branyan (more hits than Ks!), Trevor Crowe (scored in all three games, four runs total), Austin Kearns, and Travis Hafner (with a homer to boot!). Only two hitters had three hits in a game, though, listed below:

Shin-Soo Choo (Friday)
Shin-Soo Choo (Sunday).

On Friday, Choo hammered out a pair of homers and drove in 3 of the four runs the Indians plated. Heck, he SCORED half of them. And on Sunday, he scored two runs on a pair of

singles and a triple, his first of the season. Choo also walked once on Sunday. For the weekend, Choo went 7-for-14 with 4 R, 6 RBI, went 2-for-4 with RISP, and slugged 1.071.

On Friday, Tony Sipp pitched a hitless, scoreless inning, his only blemish a walk. Chris Perez too over the next inning and threw a perfect frame in 8 pitches (7 strikes), including a strikeout.

On Sunday, Perez got 2 outs (1 K) but walked one (no hits allowed) before yielding to Sipp. Sipp recorded 4 outs without allowing a hit, although he also walked a batter and struck out one.

6) Sotto voce

With one out and two men on in a 6-4 game, Choo battled to the 10th pitch against Frank Cordero, which he watched go by for strike three. He went 1-for-5 with 3 Ks in that game. Clearly, this is not an excellent game. No one goes 162-0, not even The Talented Players of Cleveland.

7) A good first impression

Shelley Duncan made an appearance in each game this weekend, scoring a run in the 9th off Cordero after a pinch-hit single in Saturday's game, making an out Friday, and reaching base three times in four plate appearances Sunday with a single and two walks. He also played a credible left field, looking more fluid and athletic than Matt LaPorta, which means he avoided swallowing his tongue.

Listen, I'm convinced that Duncan is up for three reasons:

- a) When Cabrera comes back, he can be outrighted off the 40-man without any noses losing any skin
- b) If Kearns keeps up his hot start, he could be seen as a valid trade candidate: certainly more than Duncan. Yes, Kearns is cheap, but he's an asset, and if you can turn Asset A into Asset B

that is more valuable to you, you do that

c) Duncan will be used in the "Kevin Millar Commemorative Sporadic Use" role, something I'd rather an actual yoot no be subjected to.

But dude ... the man's hitting .500/.667/.500. The props may be short-lived, but props there should be.

8) Positive signs

Travis Hafner hit his 4th homer of the season on Saturday off Johnny Cueto, who otherwise largely throttled the Indians on 4 hits and 5 Ks in 6 IP. The order has been shifted to put Choo in the 2 slot and Hafner in the 3, which is kind of like what I was suggesting earlier, except not.

Jhonny Peralta lined a two-out two-strike single to left for the game-winning RBI Sunday. He also took two collars and made an error, but hey.

Raffy Perez pitched a scoreless inning.

9) Head of the class

I'm on record as being skeptical about Trevor Crowe's long-term viability as an everyday major-league outfielder. Consider this, though: in Crowe's 9 games, he has at least a hit in each one and walked to get on base in the 9th. He has four multi-hit games out of 9 and has reached base at least twice in a fifth game. Although he has only two extra-base hits and an ISO of .108, he is a switch-hitter who is sporting a .390 OBP, strikes out fewer than once per 8 PA, has a 3:1 SB:CS ratio, and had a quasi-clutch (it was clutch, but the rally fell short) 2-run single in the 9th inning against Cincinnati's closer. He is hitting .429 with runners on base, and .625 with a runner in scoring position. (Okay, the samples are preposterously small. But he is hitting.)

Ironically, right now, Crowe is struggling mightily against left-handers, just as the man he replaced in the field was. On the other hand, it's 9 plate appearances. But when your leadoff man, even a temporary ersatz leadoff man, posts a .390 OBP, that's nothing but good.

Question: would you send Crowe back down when Marte comes off the DL? I wouldn't.

10) The corner turned by a pro's pro

An ordinary relief pitcher might crumble under the weight of an incredibly poor outing. A lesser man might question whether he had the stuff ... the fortitude ... the *je ne sais quoi* ... to come back and perform at the highest level in the greatest pressure situation in all sport. And truly, Kerry Wood's outing against Kansas City was the stuff of legend ... legendary *badness*.

.

But no! Given the opportunity in a one-run game Sunday to reclaim his throne amongst the very finest in the league, Kerry Wood did not disappoint. Indeed, Wood pounded the strike zone like few others, hurling an amazing 11 strikes in 13 pitches in a shutout inning of relief, stranding the tying run on base and racking up a K in the process.

Wood is one of the few pitchers in the majors with a K-rate of more than 1 per inning, and by proving that he is now fully back on the save horse, so to speak, it is clear that this is a man who can help a team win ... potentially even win it all. He could be that player that makes the difference between a good season and the playoffs ... between a playoff appearance and the pennant ... verily, between the pennant and the title. In a league which, as a whole, is starved for right-handed power arms, Kerry Wood stands out as a commodity in short supply and long experience.

Is there a GM out there with the foresight to acquire Wood early, before other, lesser GMs have fully recognized that Wood is back in his prime form? It remains to be seen. Let us say this: a certain team acquired a certain Mark DeRosa last season. Did that team make the playoffs? I think history shows you the answer to that one. Of course they did. Of *course*.