

The B-List: 6/1

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, June 02 2010 3:00 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, June 02 2010 6:24 PM

The Indians take the first game of the set in Detroit 3-2, but not without some late-inning drama, mostly in the guise of inept defense. Thankfully, Chris Perez was able to bail out Jason Donald on behalf of Jake Westbrook, and Kerry Wood was able to bail out Russ Branyan on behalf of himself. With help from the longball and the singular magic of Mark Grudzielanek, the Indians made three runs stand up for only the third time this season ... all 3-2.

FINAL	1	2	3
Indians (19-31)	0	0	0
Tigers (26-25)	0	1	0

W: Westbrook (3-3) L: Bonderman (2-3) S: K. Wood (3)

We're not Detroit!



1) Whirlwind recap

I will not bore you with the reasons for the missed columns, insofar as no one is actually interested in such things, but here is what you missed:

Mitch Talbot was good. Jake Westbrook wasn't very good. Mark Buehrle balked twice whether he believes it or not. Bobby Jenks was very, very bad. Manny Acta was bad (bunting to take the bat out of Choo's hands is a bad play). Fausto Carmona wasn't very good, but did induce a lot of ground balls. Tony Sipp was execrable. David Huff's head is very hard. Everyone on the planet was more concerned about David Huff than David Huff was. Tofu Lou was an extra base machine. Joba Chamberlain has a career ERA of one point seven bazillion against Cleveland. Most sentient bipeds either overtly or secretly revel in this fact. The Indians still tried to blow it, but failed. Kerry Wood got a save. Justin Masterson was awesome until he wasn't. Tony Sipp was execrable again. Mitch Talbot was pretty darned good, despite a lack of grounders. Every reliever sucked large rocks, including Raffy Perez (not new), Chris Perez (very new!), and Jamey Wright (nobody cares). Jason Donald collected an extra-base hit in three straight games. Shin-Soo Choo became encased in ice. Russ Branyan had 17 plate appearances with no strikeouts (and also hit two homers). Grady Sizemore died, but confined the effects to his knee. Travis Hafner had as many RBI walks as extra-base hits (1). Jhonny Peralta used 4 XBH to raise his SLG to .418. This is higher than Travis Hafner's. Tofu Lou's three doubles on Saturday gave him ... five doubles for May. Marson hit .240 in May and posted a .591 OPS, and improvement of .127 over April. Few believe another 127-point improvement is due in June. Mark Grudzielanek did not get an extra-base hit. The sun rose in the east. Water

The B-List: 6/1

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, June 02 2010 3:00 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, June 02 2010 6:24 PM

remained wet. Austin Kearns hit 7 singles. Hector Ambriz pitched in his first game in which Cleveland won since May 11th. Trevor Crowe had two multi-hit games, giving him six on the season, and still finished with an OBP of only .319. Shelley Duncan had more games with an RBI than without. Aaron Laffey got the wazoo to go back to starting. Jensen Lewis got the reverse wazoo and went back to sucking. We claimed Shane Lindsay off waivers because he has posted walk rates of (2006) 6.32, (2008) 5.78, (2009) 6.21, and (2010) 11.20 per 9 innings, and because we are ... short on walks? Wait, no we aren't. Okay, I don't know why we claimed Shane Lindsay. But we did. Huzzah!

2) Stealth Quality

Jake Westbrook nearly put the finishing touches on an excellent start last night, but had to leave after walking his first batter of the game with two outs in the bottom of the 8th. In all, he gave up 1 run on 5 hits, and the one run was the result of a double, a runner-advancing groundout, and an infield single. Westbrook did benefit from a fine throw by center fielder Trevor Crowe to turn a double into a single-out combo, but otherwise, Westbrook was largely in control, retiring 11 in a row from the 4th to the 7th inning.

At this point, is it reasonable to talk about Jake being "back" from his UCL replacement? Consider:

2010 WHIP: 1.41
Career WHIP: 1.38

2010 ERA: 4.36
Career ERA: 4.31

2010 K/9: 5.05
Career K/9: 4.91

The B-List: 6/1

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, June 02 2010 3:00 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, June 02 2010 6:24 PM

2010 BB/9: 3.41

Career BB/9: 2.80

His GB:FB ratio of 1.33 is lower than his 1.66-ranges from 2004-2006, but really, if you stacked this season up against either 2006 or 2007, you'd hardly be able to tell the different. There are more walks, but that is highly-colored by his early-season command troubles: in his last five starts, Westbrook has walked 2, 1, 2, 2, and 1 hitter; in fact, except for the one-time acker against Toronto, Westbrook has walked no more than 2 hitters in any of his last eight starts.

Westbrook is not *great*, but he has never been *great*. He is capable of going deep into games, and when he is near his best, he can give you one of these: a game with fewer hits than innings pitched, pitching into (and beyond) the 7th inning, even without striking out many guys (in this game, 1). If he can keep the ball in the park (this was only the second game in eight in which he didn't allow a homer), he'll be a valuable addition for someone come Trade Deadline Day.

(There is speculation that he might take less money or a shorter deal to stay with Cleveland. I consider this unlikely. I wouldn't mind being wrong, but ... I'm not.)

3) A minor hiccup

Chris Perez' last outing could hardly have been more dreadful: he faced three batters, gave up a hit to each of them, and two of the hits were homers. Giving up three runs in zero-thirds of an inning is a good way to cause the ol' ERA to bump.

So it was nice to see that not only did Perez get the call in the obvious "right-handed setup man" situation, but that he throttled a dangerous Magglio Ordonez with two men on (in a two-run game) without allowing so much as a fair ball.

On the season, Perez has allowed too many walks to give him a good WHIP or K/BB ratio. In his last 8 outings, though, Perez has walked only two hitters; 4 in his last 10. In the meantime, he has struck out a hitter in each outing in which he faced more than one batter or was not

projectile-vomiting nitroglycerin in Yankee Stadium.

4) But more importantly

Kerry Wood was able to shake off an error by Russ Branyan on the potential game-ending ground ball to finish off his third save on the season. He, too, faced a first-and-third two-out situation, and calmly dispatched Ramon Santiago on a harmless fly to left to end the game.

Wood has now converted his last three save opportunities in a row. Further, the Indians have not lost a single game in which Wood has pitched since May 21st, a total of 4. For a team playing .380 ball, that has to be considered significant. It shows the kind of veteran leadership and calming presence Wood provides: the team knows that if Wood is ready to pitch, then the game is in the bag. How can you put a price on that sort of tangible intangibility? It would be difficult, but it seems axiomatic that a playoff contender would have to find out, and the sooner, the better. How long can a contender hope to retain their tenuous upper hand, or hope to close ground on the Division leaders, without the certainty and superannuated shutdownosity that few players in this league provide? It's a dangerous game to play. I don't see that there is anything to gain by putting off the single move that may decide who plays into mid-October, and who does not ...

5) Super Smash Bros.

Russ Branyan hit his 7th homer of the season to break up Jeremy Bonderman's shutout bid, and Shin-Soo Choo ended an 0-for-19 stretch with his team-leading 8th homer to stake Westbrook to a 2-1 lead in the 6th. Of the three players slugging over .450 for the Indians, Branyan and Choo make up two-thirds.

Branyan now has 14 RBI to go with his 7 HR, making him the Brook Jacoby of 2010. He is one of two Indians to have more homers than doubles (Andy Marte is the other, with 1 homer. And no doubles.).

6) And leading the team in slugging ...

The B-List: 6/1

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, June 02 2010 3:00 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, June 02 2010 6:24 PM

... your very own Jason Donald!

Yeah, yeah, it's a small sample. It's funny to see, though, and it's not like Donald has 4 AB or anything: he's made at least 50 plate appearances. But with his second triple in three games, Donald is now hitting a robust .277/.320/.511 on the season to lead the team in SLG. In fact, after a prolonged (or, at least, as prolonged as a guy with 50 PA can have) drought, Donald has an extra-base hit in four of his last five games and has hits in 8 of his last 10 games (11-for-32 with 4 doubles and 2 triples). He may or may not be this or that: he's already made a second error in only his 14th game, and Luis Valbuena looked hot in stretches last season, too. But he's starting to convince me that he at least has major-league potential, something I was pretty skeptical of as recently as this spring.

7) Mightless Mark!

You know, without Mark Grudzielanek's RBI single, the unearned run in the 9th might have tied the game and sent the Indians into extra innings without a lot of bullets. Grood has three straight two-hit games under his belt, including 2 RBI in the wild 13-11 win over New York, and is hitting .291 on the season with a nice .348 OBP. That can play in this league, so concerns that Grood was finished at age 39 appear to have been misguided. Mea culpa from me, and kudos to Mark.

Still, would it kill somebody to mix in an extra-base hit? I mean, even one? A double down the line? A botched diving attempt? A charitable official scorer? Anything?

(Gotta think Grood's on the Jamey Carroll Commemorative Nothing Deal to a Contender plan.)

8) Don't look now, but someone is very average!

And that someone is Jhonny Peralta.

The B-List: 6/1

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, June 02 2010 3:00 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, June 02 2010 6:24 PM

With two more singles last night, Peralta is now hitting .247/.330/.420 on the season. Is this good? It is not. Is it functionally different from his career .265/.331/.425 line? It is not. Is it significantly better than last year's .254/.316/.375 line? Yes, it is. For comparison's sake, this is better than division rivals Mark Teahen and Brandon Inge at the lukewarm corner, and comparable in raw OBP/SLG to players such as Kung Fu Panda (Pablo Sandoval) and better than guys such as Chase Headley and Maicer Izturis.

Is this damning with faint praise? Yes, it is. But after getting 6 XBH in April, Peralta posted a robust 14 in May, so things are looking up, at least from a run-production standpoint. (Peralta had 6 RBI in April compared to 16 in May, and driving in 16 runs on this team is kind of a big deal.)

9) Pumpkin Alert!

After an unsustainable .373/.429/.627 April, Austin Kearns ... well ... didn't sustain it. He hit .250/.333/.337 in May, and the bloom is off his rose. Get him out of there. Give me more Matt LaPorta at this point: what do I get for continuing to trot out this guy in the three slot? Am I giving up on him too soon? Who cares? Is he part of the future? I sincerely hope not. So in keeping with the Posnanski Treatise: more Matt LaPorta or Mike Brantley or Anyone Young and less Austin Kearns, please.

Note: Kearns mashes lefties to the tune of ... Jhonny Peralta (.344 OBP, .400 SLG). So where I say "mashes," naturally, I mean "does not mash."