

The B-List: 6/10

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Friday, June 11 2010 4:23 PM -

It seemed like the Indians had blown the game before the fans had found their seats, giving up a four-spot in the first ... and then they crawled back into it with a pair of three-run innings, taking the lead ... then blowing the lead in the ninth ... then loading the bases with no outs ... then squandering the opportunity to score a run without needing a hit by getting two quick outs ... then won the game on the second-most-feeble two-run single of the game. And the crowd ... well ... they were largely confused. Or absent.

FINAL

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

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[9]

[R]

[H]

[E]

[Red] Sox (35-27)

[4]

[1]

[0]

[0]

[0]

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[0]

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0

2

7

10

0

Indians (23-36)

0

0

3

0

0

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3

0

0

2

3

12

4

W: K. Wood (1-2) L: Bard (1-2)



Kerry Wood: proven winner!

1) The Plaxico Burrese Commemorative Start

Mitch Talbot didn't get much help from his defense, giving up 3 unearned runs on a trio of errors by Andy Marte (the 4th error, by Austin Kearns, had no impact on the scoring). As a result, the 2 earned runs in 4 innings pitched, with the first inning greatly extended because of the ham-handed pratense, looks like a decent-enough result of a pitcher victimized by bad luck and slaughterhouse defense.

Appearances in this case are deceiving.

Mitch Talbot did not leave the game because he had given up 5 runs: he had to leave the game because he had thrown NINETY-NINE PITCHES in FOUR INNINGS.

Yeah, I know that the first inning Talbot was forced to work extra hard, and he faced only 7 hitters in the 3rd and 4th, giving up a single (thrown out stretching) and a walk.

But let's speak of this walk for a moment.

Talbot had 4 walks in 4 innings: defense has nothing to do with this. In addition, the first batter of the game doubled on a 3-ball count ... then the third batter walked on five pitches ... Youkilis

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was safe on an error hitting a 2-2 pitch ... and Drew walked on four pitches. Fully fourteen of the twenty-three hitters Talbot faced saw at least two balls. Talbot threw 54 strikes in 99 pitches, induced only 3 swinging strikes, and threw a first-pitch strike to fewer than half the hitters (10 of 23).

In his last 10 starts, Talbot has walked at least three hitters a saddening 7 times. He has 6 Quality Starts and is 6-3 in those 10 starts, so it's not like walking hitters is completely anathemic to Talbot being successful. However, I think there's something here that bears watching.

See, Talbot has a very poor 34:31 K:BB ratio in 77 2/3 IP. That's a pretty feeble 3.94 K/9 rate, something hard to have long-term success with unless combined with extreme groundballedness or super-stingy walk and home-run rates (often a by-product of groundballedness) or some sort of deal one regrets in one's later years as the smell of brimstone becomes overpowering. But I don't think the walk rates are necessarily the hallmark of a guy who's nibbling: what I've seen is a guy who simply doesn't have a whole lotta skill yet at keeping the ball's movement in a particular zone.

If you'd blindfolded me, I might have picked Talbot as the guy coming off UCL replacement rather than Westbrook. I mean, it's not like Talbot's ball moves a ton, or that he's throwing it all over the place, but it just looks like where he'd like to put the ball in a six-inch-wide zone, he's only got ten-inch-wide control. Sometimes this is fine, and he holds hitters to a .260 AVG with a .404 SLG. Not super-excellent or anything, but pretty good.

Here's a weird split: Talbot has a 20:10 K:BB ratio against right-handers. Two-to-one is perfectly acceptable. Of course, they're hitting .312 with a .476 SLG, so that's kinda crummy. But against lefties, he is holding hitters to a .183 AVG with a paltry .296 SLG, and his K:BB ratio is ... a "backwards" 14:21. Sure enough, three of his four walks were to David Ortiz (1) and J.D. Drew (2). (The other walk was the Kevin Youkilis, which is like striking out Bartolo Colon: it's not noteworthy.)

My guess is that Talbot's natural ball tails "left-to-right," meaning in to a right-handed hitter and away from the lefty. This means that lefties that hit the ball are trying to drive a pitch that ends up on the outside part of the plate, or watch it waft out of the zone, while righties get a ball that comes right into their power zone if they hit it. He'll need either a purer sinker or a pitch that complements this "tailing" action (a four-seamer or a cutter, perhaps) if he's going to take the

next step up from “Soweresque rookie gork” to “Long-term useful rotation member.”

2) Welcome back! Now go away!

What a way to return to the big-league club: Andy Marte was summoned back off the DL, placing Matt LaPorta in the minors and Mark Grudzielanek on the bread line. (The two moves aren't solely attributable to Marte, but they are somewhat connected.) And in his first start, Marte brought out the Corey Smiff Commemorative Model XG3000 “Frine Pan.”

The first error was simple butchery, allowing a ground ball to eat him up and load the bases instead of producing either one or two outs. But the second was more in homage to his couterpart, Jhonny Peralta, he of the three-run error in the Horror in Detroit: clubbing the ball like a baby seal, pausing to butter his hands, and unleashing a throw not normally attributed to professional baseball players, talented shrews, or *Homo Habilis*. The fact that only two runs scored on the play point out that the throw was only two-thirds as disastrous as Peralta's ill-fated affair, but then, Marte was not handicapped (as was Peralta) with Andy Marte playing first base.

Marte had two singles in three trips to the plate, a fine offensive night including a run scored and an RBI. He hit 1-for-1 with a runner in scoring position, and is now hitting $.250/.389/.429$. But answer me this:

a) If Andy Marte was designated for assignment, would someone pick him up on waivers to plug him into the major-league roster? Even Minnesota, whose third basemen produce an aggregate -10.5 VORP (that's NEGATIVE TEN POINT FIVE)?

b) If Jhonny Peralta is traded and Lonnie Chisenhall is not ready until 2012, do you consider a Marte/Valbuena/Hodges triumvirate to be a valid 3B solution for a year and a half?

The answer to (a) is “No.” The answer to (b) is “HELL no.”

3) Tofu Lou and the Temple of Wazoo

Lou Marson's major-league season is taking a breather after last night's game, as he will get the regular catching reps Carlos Santana was getting in Columbus (and vice versa). He ends this part of the season (I expect him in Sept.) hitting .191/.268/.262, with three hundred thousand balls to the screen (either PB or WP).

I am not certain Marson will ever hit well enough to play every day, and just as uncertain about his ability to catch at the major-league level. I think his defense improved significantly from the first weeks of the season until now, but it still wasn't very good. This having been said, catchers generally take longer to fully develop, and Marson won't turn 24 for another two weeks. In the abstract, it was good for him to get the major-league reps, not only defensively (seeing pitchers who generally have more movement and stuff than those he'll catch in AAA) but offensively (seeing pitchers who generally have more movement and stuff than those he'll not hit in AAA) as well. Experience is a fine teacher and he's a rookie and all that sort of stuff.

In the concrete, of course, it is a fine thing to see Marson go, because he was simply a dreadful hitter. The one exception is his small-sample numbers against left-handed pitching, hitting an amazing (for Tofu Lou) .341/.383/.500 in 47 or so PA. If not for his preposterous .124/.218/.155 numbers against righties, he could actually play. And he leaves on a high note, lacing ... okay, maybe "placing" ... okay, "blooping" a single off left-hander Jon Lester for a two-out 2-RBI single in the 6th that gave Cleveland a 6-5 lead. In addition, he stole his 4th base of the season against never being caught. Overall, he caught 38.1% of would-be basestealers, had a .993 fielding percentage, and caught nearly two-thirds of all pitches thrown by Jake Westbrook.

It's not so much that I'll miss Marson as it is that I won't miss Marson at all, but he had a nice send-off game and has some promise for a career, possibly as a future platoon partner with Gregg Zaun's son. For now, let us not say "good bye," but rather "Adieufulou."

4) Nice hose!

Trevor Crowe caught Mike Cameron trying to stretch a single into a double.

It deserves to be said out loud: in 2010, Trevor Crowe has been our best defensive center fielder.

5) The proven winner

Kerry Wood recorded two quick outs, then fired two strikes past J.D. Drew.

He then broke off a vicious curveball that ... hit Drew in the foot.

He then uncorked two pitches out of the zone before unleashing the flattest, straightest, belt-highest, fattest, gravy-drippingest home run pitch any human player has ever thrown.

However, because of his ability to retire the next hitter and because of his veteran leadership and leadery veterinarian, he won his first game of the season. Cleveland has won each of the last six games in which Wood has appeared, a streak that prospective trade partners should definitely keep in mind when looking toward the second half of the season.

6) Rally hats for all!

Off replacement closer Dan Bard, Trevor Crowe was able to coax a walk by cleverly refusing to swing at any pitch over his head. Shin-Soo Choo then followed with an excellent piece of hitting, taking a low and away fastball into the left field corner for a double to put runners on second and third with no outs.

Instead of intentionally walking Austin Kearns, Bard challenged Kearns to swing at any of four pitches that nearly hit him, which Kearns did not, so he walked anyway.

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And then Travis Hafner, down 0-2 in the count, provided an insight into veteran clutchy leadership hitting by watching strike three right down the pipe.

Look: yes, it was 100 mph. Yes, it was a quality pitch. But what were you looking for there? An eephus pitch? Given that a weak ground ball ... heck, a *6-4-3 DP* ... scores the tying run in all likelihood, the one thing you CAN'T do is WATCH strike THREE.

And then Jhonny Peralta fouled out, so the "run even on an out" gambit was closed.

Russ Branyan, who had struck out in his first plate appearance (in a nice ceremony, the team presented him with the ball for his one millionth career strikeout), then faced Bard, who tried to power an inside fastball past Branyan, or at least force him to hit the ball into the shift.

Which he did.

In a "guided Nerf" sort of way, it was the perfect hit: just over the extra-deep second baseman, but in front of the right fielder, and Shin-Soo Choo, running on contact, nearly crossed the plate before the ball hit the ground.

7) Worth mentioning

The Indians scored 5 of their 8 runs with two outs. They hit 5-for-14 with runners in scoring position, while holding the BoSox to 2-for-14 in the same circumstance.

8) Pay no attention to the non-genius

Jensen Lewis' second inning of work was perfect.

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9) Perhaps not NO attention

Two of Lewis' six outs recorded were "lineouts." Four were in the air. He still scares me.

10) Half mortal

Frank Herrmann did not complete his inning of work, allowing a booming double and a walk, throwing only 9 strikes in 20 pitches. Oh, well, even a cyborg is *half* human.

11) Ho Hum Dept.

Chris Perez finished off the 7th and pitched a scoreless 8th.