

The B-List: 6/29

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

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The Indians won their third straight game with a second win against the Blue Jays, and today's B-List focuses on the Medium-sized Issues: how truly effective was Fausto Carmona? How much confidence does the bullpen provide, and how much of that is residually unfair? How well is Kerry Wood's marketing campaign going? Why is the lineup constructed the way it is? Was Jayson Nix simply miscast as a third baseman, or is he simply bad? If Austin Kearns and Andy Marte are your defensive replacements, are your starters actually made of iron?

FINAL

1

2

3

Blue Jays (40-38)

0

0

0

Indians (29-47)

2

1

0

W: Carmona (7-6) L: Morrow (5-6) S: K. Wood (8)



It was polite to return the two gift runs, but was it truly *necessary*?

1) The “Fausto Fade”

If there were one element of Fausto Carmona’s 2010 season I could change, it would be his slow starts:

Pitches 1-25: .319/.353/.479

Pitches 26-50: .192/.257/.222

Pitches 51-75: .242/.299/.343

Pitches 76-100: .247/.352/.301

I mean, these aren’t enormous samples, in the neighborhood of 100 plate appearances each. (These are from Baseball Reference, because ESPN’s make no sense.) You can see that Carmona does a good job of limiting hitters to singles and doubles in the latter stages of the game: it’s only in the first inning or so that he looks extremely hittable.

Admittedly, there’s a confound here, in that the first pitches a pitcher throws are ALWAYS against the top of a lineup, ostensibly where the better hitters reside. After that it’s a crapshoot: you can’t tell me ahead of time who is going to be up in the 6th. In the 1st, though, I can guarantee you the 1-2-3 slots, and unless the manager is Dusty Baker or the team is Houston, at least two of those hitters should be well above average.

Still, it's interesting that out of the box, Carmona appears to need a doze pitches or so to "get going." His OPS allowed is under .700 from the 2nd through 6th innings, but is .720 in the first. Again, the confound is noted, but it's irritating nonetheless.

Last night was no different, as Carmona gave up both a single and a walk, although he induced a double play between them and escaped without incident. Nicely enough, his first 6 outs were via the ground ball; 7 of his first 9, 9 of his first 12, and 12 of his first 15. That's pretty much the recipe for Fausto Success, so it's nice to see it being followed so religiously.

Things sort of fell apart from there: after Instant Out McDonald grounded out, Fausto yielded a pair of singles and hit a batter to load the bases. And despite getting the bouncing-back Vern Wells to pop out on the first pitch, Carmona allowed a two-run single to .204-hitting Adam Lind before getting out of the inning. (Lind is far more talented than .204, but the fact remains that he is having a miserable season.)

After this, Carmona started the 7th with a walk of Lyle Overbay, gave up a single to Fauntleroy Molina, and struck out Instant Out to end his night. He was lifted for the lefty with Mighty Fred Lewis coming to the plate, and exited the scene after 101 pitches.

Now, with the caveat that the Indians could very well have gotten out of the inning to give him a 2-run start instead of a 4-run start had they been able to practice even the most basic of baseball skills (catching the ball, throwing the ball into a five-foot-wide box), this represents a bit of a bugbear for Carmona. Remember that last line above?

Pitches 76-100: .247/.352/.301

That .352 OBP is pretty lousy, especially when it comes from guys hitting .247. When your OBP is more than 100 points higher than you're average, well ... as a hitter, that's really something great. As a pitcher, it's the inverse.

Remember that sub-.700 OPS I mentioned from innings 2 through 6? In the 7th inning, it's .907. In the 8th, .974.

Of course, these samples are miniscule, but the pitch count gives us a clue as to what is happening here: Fausto pretty much loses his bowel control once he gets deep enough into the game.

I'm not sure how much of this can be attributed to "fatigue:" Fausto is enormous and has the Clemens-type "large base" build, where this is euphemistic for "has a gigantic rear end and thunder thighs. Carmona is hardly "fat," not in a Carlos Silva sense: I mean that he has the kind of large upper legs that OUGHT to make him MORE likely to be able to handle going deep into games. And it's not like he starts throwing 95 and ends up throwing 89: there isn't a noticeable drop in velocity from the games I've seen.

No, it just looks like Fausto ... just stops pitching as well. Whether this is physical ("I cannot repeat my delivery!"), mechanical ("Where did my damned release point go?"), or concentrational ("Of all the flavors, I find strawberry the most pleasing!"), I can't say.

2) Glass three-quarters full!

Consider this thought experiment: let's say it's still early in June, right after Tony Sipp went through his "retire 7 of 27 hitters" stretch. Joe Smiff is in AAA. Raffy Perez is recovering from a bad start. And I tell you that these three pitchers combined to face 7 hitters.

At that point, you're thinking, what? Four runs? Five runs? Probably didn't get through an entire inning?

Instead, none of the seven hitters got a hit. Two got on base, one via a walk and the other because of an error that would embarrass Pete Incaviglia. No runs, 22 strikes in 32 pitches, and 5 outs recorded.

We've had some pretty incredible (not meant as a synonym for "excellent," but rather, "that strains my ideas of what is credible!") relief pitching this season, as evidenced by the fact that

the three men in question have ERAs of 6.39, 7.36, and 4.21. But the fact is, they did a good job last night, and the bullpen hasn't really been responsible for a horrific late-inning loss in quite some time (except for Wood's non-save against the Mets).

3) Glass one-quarter empty

On the other hand, with a man on third, uncorking a wild pitch to give up a run is not the most strategic maneuver.

The Indians gave up two of Carmona's runs because Sipp tossed a ball past Carlos Santana, then gave way to Smiff, who induced an "inning ending pop fly to short right" that Shin-Soo Choo butchered in a manner than can only be described as "BLEAAAARGH!" Had Sipp simply thrown a pitch out of the strike zone to walk one of the Alexes Gonzalez (which he did anyway) and Choo simply used his glove as a ball-catcher rather than to emulate a John Isner serve, the Indians would have escaped with a scoreless 7th.

(On the other hand, we scored our first two runs on an egregiously bad throw by Instant Out, so I suppose it all comes out in the wash.)

4) You. Sit down.

I thought going back-to-back with Kerry Wood was a bit of a risk, but it was a solid play that worked out quite well.

Going back-to-back-to-back? I'm not sure we did that with Bob Wickman.

Actually, I bet we did, but it does seem somewhat unusual these days to see a closer three nights in a row. One of the reasons for this is that it isn't very common for a team to get three close wins in a row (had the score been 8-4, I assume we would not have seen Wood). But another is that going three nights in a row is kind of hard to do well.

Kerry Wood did it well.

Yes, he did indeed strike Wolfgang Molina on an 0-2 pitch, and I doubt anyone was more disappointed by this than Wood himself. But after that, we're talking a whiff and a game-ending double play. In all, a tidy 10 pitches, 7 for strikes, and no hits or walks allowed.

Now, I REALLY doubt that you'll see Wood tonight, but for a guy entering the Fourth of July Sale at the Meat Market phase of the summer, Wood could hardly have done more to pump up his desirability, and I appreciate that. Well done.

5) Miscasting and Wishcasting

I first ran across the term "wishcasting" at Baseball Prospectus, I believe from Christina Kahr. The idea is that it's a hopelessly-optimistic "forecast," but with enough fantasy to make it more wishful thinking than analysis.

Anyway, I was horrified last week when the Indians picked us Jayson Nix, and the only reason I found for his addition was that in a pinch, he could play third base. That's what he was playing for Chicago when they jettisoned him, although ... he was not playing it particularly WELL:

2B: 0 errors, 4.89 Range Factor

SS: 0 errors, 6.75 Range Factor

3B: 5 errors, 1.99 Range Factor

It would appear to the lay fan that Jayson Nix's squareness was being forced into the round hole at third base. (Caveat: I do not know how Range Factor is calculated, or even what it purports to *mean*, but those numbers can't say anything GOOD about Nix at 3B.) Hey, they needed a 3B and already had a 2B. Fine. We moved Jhonny Peralta, too.

In fact, remember when Peralta first moved? We were willing to ascribe a certain amount of his hitting troubles to the fact that he was learning a new position ... one that he was, by the way, playing WAY better than Jayson Nix was in HIS stint there.

Jim Margalus of [Sox Machine](#) tells me that Nix' "natural position" is second base, and interestingly enough, in his career, his hitting while playing each position:

2B: .227/.299/.373

3B: .132/.253/.206

Now, listen, the first line is still bad. A .299 OBP is crummy no matter how you slice it. Of course, it does include some ABs from this poor season. But ... that's decent plate discipline ... and an ISO of .146. Granted, Not Comiskey Park inflates these things, but in his brief time in Cleveland, two of his four hits were doubles, and he appears to have nonzero ability.

It may be that playing third was Really Bad for Jayson Nix. Is he my first choice now? No, I can't go that far. But he appears to play a pretty good second base, and he currently has the market cornered in being Not Anderson Hernandez.

6) Intermediate Lineup Construction

Consider Trevor Crowe as leadoff hitter.

The cynical reason for this is that he is fast and plays center field, so plug him in. The more-reasoned but still quickly-considered reason is that he's fast, can switch-hit, and our middle infielders are all young, struggling, or bad.

But here's the thing: consider every offensive regular with an OBP of .320 or higher (which is not a very high bar, I admit):

Choo: .285/.387/.467

Santana: .333/.456/.704

Kearns: .276/.360/.431

Hafner: .254/.367/.431

Peralta: .256/.321/.406

Basically, these are the only guys you'd consider as being clearly better at getting on base (the leadoff hitter's primary attribute) than Crowe, and Peralta is iffy (Crow has a .306 OBP, not that much lower than Peralta). Of these guys, only Choo is truly fast: three of these men are actively slow. And I'd much rather these guys hit where they have more RBI potential than see them lead off.

Crowe leads off for two reasons:

- a) To see if he can (The Posnanski Treatise)
- b) He's all that's left

You could argue for Donald or Nix or even Mike Brantley at some point, but for now, Crowe's not just there by default, he's the *best* choice.

7) Snuck one past you

Austin Kearns is a great comeback story, playing well in a healthy season for the first time in a long time.

Travis Hafner has a higher OBP, the same SLG, and a higher ISO. He slugged .484 in June.

8) Welcome back some more!

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Matt LaPorta hit a solo shot last night.