

The B-List: 9/24 - 9/26

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, September 27 2010 2:01 PM - Last Updated Monday, September 27 2010 2:06 PM

The Indians pull themselves out of the cellar by taking 3 of 4 from the Royals, which also gives them the season series win 10-8. In today's B-List, Buff talks about a remarkable performance from Josh Tomlin, adequate performances from other starters, the near-perfect Saturday bullpen, and why Shin-Soo Choo voodoo dolls are big sellers in the Kansas City area. He also makes a disturbing comparison, welcomes a couple new faces, and wonders how a minor auto accident can result in more repairs than the vehicle itself is actually worth.

| FINAL | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Royals (63-90) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Indians (63-91) | 1 | 1 | 1 |

W: Tomlin (5-4) L: Hochevar (6-6)

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FINAL

1

2

3

Royals (63-91)

0

0

1

Indians (64-91)

0

0

3

W: Gomez (4-5) L: Greinke (9-14)

FINAL

1

2

3

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Royals (63-92)

1

0

0

Indians (65-91)

0

0

0



W: R. Perez (6-1) L: Tejada (3-5) S: Pestano (1)

Tomlin's start, pounding Greinke, the bullpen, Sunday's comeback ... tell me you saw ANY of these things coming.

0) Administrative Notes

So ... last week was not a good week. It took three appointments with Time Warner to actually accomplish what I wanted with the internet service, and my son's middle school decided that the "letter of the law" is a lot more important with his IEP than the spirit thereof, after deciding it would be a fine idea for the substitute in his most challenging class not to have advance notification of his accommodations, then we lost the minivan for a week, and had over three hours notice about the sleepover my daughter invited someone to. So yeah. We lost to Minnesota's B-team because ... well ... we ARE a B-team. We lost to Kansas City in the opener because ... well ... I can't really explain that one: we were shut down by Sean O'Sullivan, who had given up more than a run an inning in EACH of his previous 4 starts and is plainly terrible. I meant to write about them, but did not. I'm not all that convinced you would glean much insight from me holding my head and moaning "Ahoouoooo! Waaaaaugh! *plotz**".

1) ¡Josh!

Let's start with the obvious: Josh Tomlin pitched his first career major-league complete game with a four-hit gem Friday that required 112 pitches, 75 of which were thrown for strikes. Tomlin was dominant through 8 innings, giving up 1 run on 3 hits and 1 walk while striking out 6. One of the striking things was the WAY in which he got to that point: Tomlin's best pitch Saturday was a cut fastball that he ran into the hands of left-handed hitters, who got only 1 of the 4 hits Tomlin allowed for the game and didn't draw either of the walks.

In fact, although the samples haven't gotten large enough to get real serious about, right now Tomlin's cutter gives him a weapon against left-handers that he has no real analog for against righties:

vs. LHP: .232/.281/.394

vs. RHP: .280/.342/.505

With the obvious note that I am not comparing Tomlin's cutter to Mariano Rivera's, it bears mentioning that this is one of the factors that has made Rivera such a dominant pitcher. Rivera's cutter will move very late, handcuffing left-handed hitters because he is not the least bit afraid to throw it inside to them. (In fact, there are times when it appears Rivera does nothing else.) In his 3-year splits from 2007-2009, Rivera's .196/.234/.264 line against lefties is better

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than his .213/.251/.337 line against right-handers. More interestingly to me, 27 of the 81 hits from RHB against Rivera over that span are for extra bases, including 16 doubles and 9 homers in 380 AB. Lefties tend to punch the ball more than drive it, and 12 of the 76 hits from LHB are for extra bases (incl. 4 doubles and 6 homers) in 388 AB.

If I'm not comparing Tomlin's cutter to Rivera's, then why am I bringing up Rivera's splits? I'm not entirely sure. Sometimes I start writing and hope the prose takes me somewhere interesting. Still, it seems noteworthy that 15 of the 30 hits from RHB off Tomlin are for extra bases, compared to 13 of 33 from LHB. Tomlin has faced more lefties (142 to 107 AB) as well. I guess where I end up is that Tomlin's cutter appears to be a legitimate way to approach pitching to left-handers, which is kind of a nice thing to have on a staff with guys like Masterson and Carmona who normally have much more traditional right-left splits.

Now, as far as this start goes, what is the practical difference between these two starts:

8 IP, 3 H, 1 R, 1 BB, 6 K

9 IP, 4 H, 3 R, 2 BB, 6 K

Sure, it ends up looking less impressive in the end, but let's face it: in a close game, Josh Tomlin is not on the mound for the top of the 9th inning. The fact is, when warned he had one more batter after giving up the tater to Betemit, he got that one more batter and completed the game. Stats are useful and have their place, but there is something to be said for a guy just finishing off a game like that: without making any grand attributes about personality type that I'm not qualified (nor have enough data) to make, it's better for him to be able to do that than for him not to be able to.

2) Sotto voce

Through 8 innings, Tomlin had 6 groundouts and 13 fly outs. He has given up 9 homers in 68 innings and opponents post a .189 ISO off him. For reference, this is higher than Shin-Soo Choo's isolated power (SLG-AVG).

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3) Counterpoint

David Huff gave up 14 HR in 79 2/3 IP. Opponents tattooed him for a .230 ISO. This is higher than ANY Cleveland Indian's isolated power (tops is Russ Branyan: .228 as an Indian).

4) Sydney or the bush!

Jayson Nix had three hits this weekend. None of them was a single.

Nix had two solo shots on Friday, then a double on Saturday off Zack Greinke.

27 of Nix' hits have been for extra bases: as a Cleveland Indian, Nix posts a .201 ISO that actually leads the active roster (Branyan at .228 is gone; Santana at .207 is injured).

Here's the thing, though: Nix doesn't walk very often, at just a .045 BB/PA rate. For reference, this is fourth-worst on the team, ahead of Jord Brown, who is green; Anderson Hernandez, who is gone; and Mike Redmond, who requires fresh bandages and formaldehyde to stay mobile in mummified form. And Jayson Nix can miss the ball with the best of them: he strikes out in more than a quarter of his plate appearances and has the lowest BB/K ratio of any non-pitcher who played for the Indians this season.

But there is an even more disturbing comparison to be made here:

Player A: .286 OBP
Player B: .287 OBP

Player A: .406 SLG
Player B: .409 SLG

Player A defensive comparison: Link Hogthrob, but better than Pepe the King Prawn

Player B defensive comparison: Rudy Stein, but better than Timmy Lupus

Player B is Jayson Nix.

Player A is Yoon Betancourt.

5) Tales of the Pretty Good

Cleveland's "other" emergency rookie call-up starter, Jeanmar Gomez, has a higher ERA, much higher WHIP, fewer Quality Starts, and worse record than Josh Tomlin. He also has given up more hits and more walks in fewer innings. About the only thing Gomez has going for him in a head-to-head competition for a 2011 rotation spot is that he boasts a much higher GB% and a marginally-higher K rate (but worse K:BB ratio). After a tremendous start in which 7 of his first 8 starts featured 2 runs or fewer, Gomez had back-to-back stinkers that took a lot of the Wow! Factor out of his numbers, and now he looks suspiciously like A Guy. It was nice to see Gomez get a win out of his 5-inning 1-run outing Saturday, but walking 4 guys in 5 innings is a tough way to make a living. At 22, I would be mildly surprised to see Gomez in a Cleveland uniform in April 2011, figuring he could use another year in AAA to hone his craft. After all, he had a pretty lame season in AAA *THIS* season. While I like watching him pitch in general, he's probably less than a 50% bet to be in the Opening Day rotation.

Little was remarkable about Fausto Carmona's 5 innings of work except how laborious they were. He needed 102 pitches to get through those 5 innings, and although he gave up only 2 runs on 6 hits and 2 walks, he struck out ZERO batters. The only other time this season he went at least 5 innings without striking out a batter? August 18th ... against the Royals. His September ERA is 1.82 and has given up no more than 2 runs in any of his 5 starts in September. His record this month is 1-1. Thanks a lot, offense. (He got 11 ground ball outs to 4 in the air, but got FOUR swings and misses. Four! There's "pitching to contact" and "not fooling anyone, you know.")

6) Saturday Night's all right for relieving, get a little action in

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After Gomez left the game, Aaron Laffey faced three hitters. Each made an out, and he threw 8 strikes in 10 pitches.

Joe Smiff relieved Laffey and threw 7 strikes in 11 pitches. Each of the three batters he faced grounded out.

Replacing Smiff, Justin Masterson hit Wilson Betemit. The other three hitters were retired without incident, including one who whiffed. He threw 8 strikes in 13 pitches.

Jensen Lewis came in to finish the work. He faced three hitters, each of whom was retired, including one that whiffed, throwing 7 strikes in 11 pitches

In total, the bullpen Saturday posted this line:

4 IP, 0 H, 0 R, 0 BB, 2 K (1 HBP)

7) Dept. of Completion Bias

In fact, for the weekend, Cleveland relievers posted this line:

8 IP, 3 H, 1 R, 3 BB, 5 K

In other words, nearly as good as the start by Josh Tomlin that made fans swoon.

8) Welcome to the club!

Vinnie Pestano gained his first major-league save with a hitless inning of work. He struck out a hitter, walked one, and got the next to bounce into a 4-6-3 DP to end the game.

(Chris Perez is with his wife for the birth of his son.)

Also, Luke Carlin got a hit, an RBI, and scored a run. I would not know Luke Carlin from a gaily-painted two-hundred-pound bag of Zhu Zhu pets, except his voice is probably lower-pitched and approximately 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 times less annoying.

9) The Magic of Baseball

Because even a bad, downtrodden, offensively-challenged team like ours can put together an inning like the 8th on Sunday.

Facing Robinson Tejeda, who has quietly had a pretty good season for the Royals (3.00 ERA coming into the game), Asdrubal Cabrera led off the inning by beating out an infield single. Shin-Soo Choo then fought off a pitch for a flop single to left. After getting Shelley ("Don't Call Me Sandy") Duncan down 0-2 in the count, Tejeda threw a couple more pitches before unveiling his popular Hanging Meat Curve Surprise to Duncan, who tied the game with one mighty blow.

Even then, I figured we would still find a way to botch the game.

The Indians did not botch the game.

Instead with two outs, much-maligned Andy Marte singled to left, and Luis Valbuena (Luis Valbuena!) glorped a ground rule double to right. Calling on Mike Brantley, still nursing a sore

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hamstring, to pinch-hit for Tofu Lou Marson, the Indians delighted in the sight of Brantley beating a ground ball past first baseman Kila Ka'aihue for a two-run double, setting up Pestano's heroics in the 9th.

I found myself wanting to see Brantley grow a moustache and stubble and pump his fist hobbling to second base, but it appears any Kirk Gibson fantasies will have to wait for a ball that actually goes over the fence.

10) Please torment us no longer

Shin-Soo Choo only got that one hit on Sunday, meaning that Bruce Chen might be Kansas City's only recourse. Because in the other two games, Choo went 3-for-3 with 2 walks and 4-for-5, reaching base in NINE of the TEN plate appearances he made. He is hitting .337/.455/.573 in September and hit **.377/.488/.638** against the Royals this season.

11) Blue Moon Special

Travis Hafner stole a base! (It was his SECOND this season. I had no idea.)

Andy Marte AND Luis Valbuena got two hits. In the same game!

Matt LaPorta got an extra-base hit.