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Sunday, August 27 2006 7:00 PM -

In the Monday edition of The B-List, Buff takes a look back at the weekend set with Detroit that saw the Tribe take two of three from the division leading Tigers (that still sounds weird). Buff hits on the emergence of Jeremy Sowers, who is now 5-0 with a 1.69 ERA in his last seven games. He also touches on Cliff Lee's inability to keep batted balls on the ground, and the Indians "Baezing" of Fausto Carmona by making him back into a starter.



Gee, we're winning more games with guys like Choo, Sowers, Mastny, Inglett, and Garko than we were with guys like Todd Hollandsworth, Jason Johnson, Danny Graves, Tom Laker, and Ramon Vazquez. Who could POSSIBLY have thought THAT would be the case?

1) Mastery of the Obvious!

"I have to figure a way to keep the ball in the ballpark," said (starter Cliff) Lee, who has yielded a team-high 25 homers in 162 innings.

It's a complicated game, all right.

I have an idea: given that the 4:9 GB:FB ratio was unusual in that it was more **ground balls** than I'm used to, consider developing a pitch that moves **down**

. At this point, I would seriously consider giving Lee much of September off: he's already thrown 162 innings, and I don't think we're learning a heckuva lot any more. I know he threw 202 innings last season and he's 28 (Wednesday), so he doesn't have to be "protected" any more, but don't the baseballs?

2) The best left-hander in the rotation

Well, it sure isn't Lee, and although C.C. Sabathia has been very solid, rookie Jeremy Sowers has gone 5-0 with a 1.69 ERA in his past seven starts. In only one start did he give up more hits than innings; in only 3 was his WHIP greater than 1.00 (thanks to some uncharacteristic wildness against Tampa Bay). He still has a pitiful 29 strikeouts in 70-plus innings (3.69 K/9),

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but did get four swinging Ks against Detroit (admittedly a free-swinging team). This suggests that he does have some "stuff," albeit stuff based more on location and speed variance than Verlander-esque gas. An interesting quirk was that through the first four innings, Sowers had the Tigers foul off seven pitches and swing-and-miss at two; in the last two innings, Sowers induced 6 swinging misses and 5 foul balls. Cherry-picking to after a foul-off gave Neifi Perez an 0-2 count, there were 5 misses and 2 fouls (3 to 0 in the sixth alone). In other words, it is conceivable (although not entirely likely: the samples are miniscule) that Sowers is one of those guys who can set up late-game ABs by showing hittable stuff the first time around. That's an incredibly rare skill and shouldn't be depended on ... but it would be pretty neat.

Much has been made about the "unflappable" nature of the rookie, and it's certainly an asset, but that doesn't mean much unless it's accompanied by actually getting people out, which Sowers is. With the abysmal K rate, you might have to worry about going through a whole season and facing teams a third and fourth time, but Sowers is clearly carved into next year's rotation. There is talk of shutting Sowers down because he's already reached a career-high for innings pitched and is only 23. The stathead in me applauds this move; the results-guy in me winces at who will be slotted in Sowers' rotation spot.

3) It would be easier to concentrate on the road if you didn't keep yelping and gripping the door handle with both hands

"Driving With Jake," Tuesdays on STO!
"So anyway, I was warming up, and ... hm, I don't like that song, where is that station?"
"Car in your blind spot!" (*screech, squeal*)
"Yeah, yeah, I saw it ... anyway, there was this guy in the ... hey, what's that up in that tree? Is that a kite?"
"Dog!" (*lurch, whine, honk*)
"What's he doing in the road, anyway? So I ... wait a minute, my phone's ringing ..."
"Look out for the Girl Scout troupe!" (*banks wheel, loses hubcap, screeches tires, bumps curb*) "Good Lord, we're going to die!"
"Geez, you'd think you'd never driven in traffic before. Anyway ... wait, I gotta take this ..."
"Delicatessen!" (*thump, pastrami, shouts*) "How did you hit a goddam delicatessen?!"
"It was there. Hey, what's this on the floorboard? Is that those superballs I was looking for?"
"Boutros Boutros-Ghali!" (*squeal, honk, U.N. sanction*) "Isn't that our exit?"
"Oh, yeah ... hang on ..." (*crosses six lanes of traffic in 35 feet, screeches, honks, submarine ahoogah noises, loosening bowels, Einsturzen Neubaten soundtrack*) "See? We made it just fine."

How do you give up 12 hits and 3 walks in 7 innings facing Justin Verlander and WIN? Well, you induce three double plays and get the always-dependable two-run triple from Joltin' Joe Inglett. By the way, how on earth do you walk *three* Detroit Tigers? These guys swing at anything. They walked two other times ALL WEEKEND.

I like Jake, I really do ... but can we agree that he is not always the most enjoyable pitcher to watch?

4) Who are you, and where the &*\$ have you been all %&\$^)* season?

Ferd Cabrera was dominant. Sure, he went full count on two guys before punching them out, and 2-ball counts on two other before another whiff and a fly out, but he threw two perfect innings with FOUR swinging Ks. Basically, he was unhittable. THIS is the guy I talked up in the pre-season. Again, the Tigers will swing at some pitches (he may have walked a couple Yankees with that outing), but you could do worse than a setup man who can go two perfect innings with a K/9 rate of 18.00.

Rafael Betancourt threw strikes (as usual). He started each of the three hitters he faced in the ninth with two strikes before nibbling and getting fought off (7 foul-offs), but finished off a perfect inning for his first save.

Jason Davis pitched a hitless (if scattershot) inning of setup work.

Brian Sikorski, going against the Prescription, threw 1 1/3 perfect innings; Andrew Brown threw a Davis-like 1-walk hitless inning of relief.

Only Tom Mastny (who has already been good and stayed that way) and Eddie Moo (who gave up a two-run tater) broke the mold by showing me something I expected or didn't want. Which begs the question: do we actually have bullpen arms (yes) that we can trust (no)?

5) Baserunning, amusing and not

Hey, for as much crap as I've given the coaching staff for bad baserunning, the fact is, Shin-Soo Choo simply disengaged his brain Friday night. Yes, the ball was hit well enough to be a triple. Yes, it's exciting to leg out a triple. Heck, sure, he would have been safe. Had there not been a sizable impediment already STANDING ON THIRD BASE in the form of Victor "Not Asafa Powell" Martinez. Since it didn't have an impact on the final result, it was more amusing than infuriating. I mean, I've seen that play a bunch of times, although my jersey said "Dairy Queen" on it at the time.

The Tigers attempted to steal two bases this weekend. Ivan Rodriguez was gunned out once but was safe the other time. Since the attempts were one each against our two main catchers, this was to be expected. Except that it was Victor Martinez who caught him, and Kelly Shoppach who did not. Admittedly, Martinez had the advantage of the left-handed Lee being on the mound, while Shoppach had ... Sowers ... um ... never mind.

Neifi Perez, acquired by Detroit to keep them loose ("Heh, heh, we gave up an asset to get Neifi Perez. Heh. Hey, wait, that's not funny!"), lined into the ever-popular inning-ending 5 DP (doubling Omar Infante, who is currently wondering how he is not already

Neifi Perez, off third). Ouch.

6) I have had better weekends

And so have Casey Blake and Andy Marte. Blake has not exactly found his pre-DL "stroke" yet, going 0-for-7 with a walk and 2 Ks. Marte's "stroke" is largely theoretical at this point anyway, and although striking out against Jeremy Bonderman and other Detroit pitchers is not a unique skill, Marte did go 0-for-7 with 5 punchouts on Friday and Saturday before "recovering" to only get 0-for-2 with a walk Sunday.

That's some mighty feeble hacking right there.

7) A tale of one innings

We won two out of three games this weekend by having two innings out of twenty-seven be actually good at the plate. On Friday, Choo's baserunning kept the third inning limited to 3 runs, but since we won 4-2, the 3 runs must be considered an "outburst" (it's in the Sportswriter's Code, along with the obligation to say things like "Tribe Declaws Tigers" or "Royals Flushed"). On Saturday, a much more credible 6 runs scored to lift the Tribe to an 8-5 victory. (What is greater than an "outburst," by the way? A "pummelling"? A "jailbreak"? A "pod"?) The nice thing is that each rally was driven by extra-base hits: on a weekend where no Indian went yard, a pair of doubles sparked the 3-run inning (the second of which was Choo's ersatz triple, or maybe simply a "tripe"), while two doubles and Joltin' Joe's real-live triple were featured in the 6-run version.

In the other 25 innings, the Indians scraped together a massive 4 runs.

8) Let us not say good-bye, but rather, "adieu";

Fausto Carmona's himselfian bargain (tip of the hat to Jim Barrett for that one) expired at 12:01 and he was sent down for Eddie Moo. Word is he will be "stretched back out" to be a starter in September. I have no idea if this will work. I am not entirely sure why this is being attempted. I don't necessarily disagree that Carmona needs some tuning (as a Corvair needs "some suspension work" or a Pinto could use "a little rear end retooling"), and he's already shown me he has a major-league arm, but starting? Didn't I see this movie when it was called "The Danys Baez Story"?