

The B-List: 5/10

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, May 11 2011 2:33 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, May 11 2011 3:53 PM

The Indians won yet another game in their final at-bat (ho hum) when Mike Brantley drew the dramatic walk-off walk off Kyle Farnsworth. In today's B-List, Buff congratulates Josh Tomlin on his continued success, shakes off a couple homers by the opposition, and wonders if perhaps the Indians could do a lousier job of hitting with runners in scoring position (no, they could not). He has a split view of Manny Acta, and gives some retroactive advice to Brantley, which is bad.

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Aquatic Rays (20-15)

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Indians (23-11)

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W: C. Perez (2-1)

L: Joel Peralta (1-2)

Not looking forward to tonight's pitching matchup.

0) Administrative Note

Here is what I have to say about the Angels series: I really, really, really, really hate infield singles. Unless they're by Asdrubal Cabrera. Those are awesome.

1) A predictable path has a predictable endpoint

Stop me if you've heard this one before: Josh Tomlin was cruising along until he left a pitch up and the batter hammered it for a solo homer.

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So, as it turns out, you can't actually stop me, but that's not because you hadn't heard it before.

You heard it in his last start.

You heard it in the start before that.

Is it more disturbing than hearing "... and then Fausto went insane, walked two guys, and gave up three straight hits?"

No, it is not.

One run is one run.

So Matt Joyce took him deep.

Matt Joyce is hitting .356 and slugging .554.

Stuff happens.

And except for an ill-advised "just one more guy" that led to "just one more run," Josh Tomlin pitched a fine game, once again, for his umpteenth Quality Start in a row, extending his Indians franchise record by a subumpteenth. Through six full innings, Tomlin allowed only 5 hits and 2 runs, walking one and striking out three (all in the first three innings).

He performed the same wondrous off-balancing act that has allowed him to post a 2.70 ERA through his first 7 starts, all with a very unlikely 0.85 WHIP that may defy belief but is wholly accurate as well.

I feel very much like the guy with the sandwich board proclaiming doom, or perhaps Keith Law, which is kind of the same thing, and I would love to end up coming down on the wrong side of the Josh Tomlin Flyball Experience when the tale is told and we all look back with our Great Lakes Ale and our Shiner Bock and pat our grandchildren on the head and say, "Boy, that Steve

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Buffum ... he sure did worry a lot about nothing!" I really would. I have gotten feedback from people who tell me that Tomlin's numbers are great AND you have to watch him pitch, because he's got the mojo and the "it" and the Super Nonsense Factor and what have you, and I have gotten feedback from people who hide under their respective couches when Tomlin pitches, and I have gotten feedback from people who tell me how large my penis could be if only I replied right away. I suspect at least one of these sets of people is not entirely interested in my opinion on Josh Tomlin.

Some feedback mechanisms are more valuable than others.

Still, here again is the concern for me:

Number of outs in the air: 11

Number of "loud" outs: objectively, between 6 and 9?

Masterson Number: 7

Number of hits: 6

Number of hits for extra bases: 5

It is worth noting that the only guy he walked turned into a run on one of those booming doubles. To Tomlin's credit, he has to keep his mistakes to a minimum to be effective, and this is exactly what he did. Four men doubled, and the only one who scored did so because Tony Sipp gave up a hit. Rays hitters went 0-for-5 with runners in scoring position off Tomlin.

I think we've advanced at least to the point where we can consider Tomlin a perfectly legitimate major-league starter.

And if you're going to go ahead and be able to chalk up 6 or 7 innings of 2 or 3 run ball ... every

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... single ... time ... out ... well, sign me up, like,
yesterday

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It's a far cry from Mooks of Yesteryear.

I'm still concerned.

2) Squander Vision!

I do not know what the major-league average is for a team to score a runner from third with fewer than two outs. I know that I have the typical Fan Attribution Bias in which I firmly believe that Cleveland should score a run every time it has this situation while Cleveland's opponent should score none of the times it has this situation. I cheerfully accept that this is irrational.

But we sure are f*\$&ing terrible at it right now.

The Indians drew an unconscionable ELEVEN walks off Tampa pitching last night, and scraped together 10 hits as well. Sure, three of the walks were in the ill-fated (from Tampa's perspective) 9th inning, but the Tribe put TWENTY-ONE GUYS on base and scored FIVE RUNS. This is absurd. And

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while it's bad enough to leave 13 guys on base, the fact is that this does not count the THREE guys they had erased on double plays.

In all, the Indians "hit" 1-for-14 with runners in scoring position, and the one "hit" was a preposterous weakling ground ball that Grady Sizemore beat to second base for no force out.

The double plays were exceptionally galling as they each came with more than one runner on base. The third was easily the worst, as the runners were on first and third, and by the definition of "double play," there were fewer than two outs. Pretty much anything EXCEPT a double play there would have been better: to be worse, it would have had to involve botulism spores or Colin Cowherd yelling in his "nerd voice."

But the worst of the worst might have been in the 8th inning, when Matt LaPorta's leadoff double and Jack Hannahan's sacrifice bunt produced the potential go-ahead run at third with only one out. Grady Sizemore took a mighty swing at a 1-0 pitch and ... grounded poorly to first.

No run.

Asdrubal Cabrera followed with ... a ground ball to first.

Also no run.

Sizemore's was obviously more infuriating, as there were far more options for Run Scoring Goodness available to him.

In the second inning, the Indians went down in order on a pair of whiffs and a groundout. In EVERY OTHER INNING, the Indians had at least one runner in scoring position.

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Eight innings!

And we won because John Jaso buttered his glove and Kyle Farnsworth is Kyle Farnsworth.

3) Life's little ironies

The Rays made a dramatic turnaround a couple years back by taking an "all-in" approach to defensive improvement. This worked wonders for them, although having top-notch pitching never hurts, but the fact is that the Rays have speed, agility, and sound hands all over the diamond.

This was easily-seen in several plays, not the least of which was an athletic 3-6-1 double play involving starter Andy Sonnanstine. Even Juan Cruz made an unbelievable reaction play on a ground ball up the middle by Sizemore with the bases loaded that may have fractured his hip had he had the reaction time of, say, me.

So it was with no small amusement that the 4th run for Cleveland scored on a passed ball. Cleveland scored two runs on a clean single, two walks, an infield roller, and a Hot Buttered Pitch.

I'm not sure that qualifies as a "rally" so much as a "series of pratfalls," but two runs is two runs nonetheless.

Perhaps using banana peels instead of inside-out baseball caps is not as good an idea as it sounds.

4) Do I get to worry yet?

It seems odd to express concern about a guy who led off the game with a well-struck homer for the game's first run, but over Grady Sizemore's last seven games, he has collected a total of 5 hits in 33 AB to drop his average nearly 100 points. Sure, these are all small samples, and his getaway performance from Caliheimgeles (3-for-5, 1 double, 1 homer) was excellent, but we now sport a leadoff man with a .333 OBP, and a couple of the balls he hit last night didn't look like quality swings. Ironically, the hardest ball he hit might have been the one Cruz knocked down for what looks in the game log as a simple grounder to the pitcher, and Sizemore is GENERALLY hitting the ball very well.

Still, his 19:4 K:BB ratio is pretty awful, and his strikeout percentage is close to 25%.

Sizemore has always struck out a significant number of times, but in his past 10 games, only two ended without at least one whiff, not exactly what you're looking for out of the one slot.

I think we all knew that Sizemore wasn't going to hit .390 nor slug .800 for the entire season, but this past week and a half has not been my favorite.

5) Managerial Head-Scratchers

While it's true that Josh Tomlin was pitching pretty well, he did allow a run in the 6th off a walk and a double, and he'd faced everyone at least twice.

He was up at 92 pitches, and while the Rays had only 2 runs on 5 hits, they'd been hitting the ball pretty squarely.

Sean Rodriguez is a right-handed batter with a lowly .211 batting average, but his ISO is over .200, and Tomlin had already given up four extra-base hits.

But more to the point, while some writers laud Tony Sipp's low number of inherited runners scored, I find myself wondering if Sipp even knows there are men on base as they steal with impunity. And while I am not willing to invest the time to look it up, it makes sense to me that a reliever starting an inning fresh has an advantage over one coming into the game with a runner in scoring position. Even if you liked the Tomlin v. Rodriguez matchup over a Sipp v. Rodriguez one, I'd have to ask if that included the data that Rodriguez had faced Tomlin twice, that Tomlin had thrown 92 pitches, or that he'd been smacked all over the ballyard at that point.

Sipp can either face righties or he can't: his usage as 7th-inning setup man (not to mention allowing him to stay and face Kelly Shoppach) suggests Manny Acta believes he can.

And again, while Rodriguez has power, he hits .211.

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Anyway, Rodriguez doubled off Tomlin and then Sipp was brought in, and I couldn't help wondering what the point was.

6) Department of Hat Tipping

I think we'd all prefer if the VFP finished the year with a 0.00 ERA and 100 Ks. I know he would. And after a sparkling start, he's looked a little vulnerable, blowing a save against Oakland and another one last night.

He's given up a hit in each of his last five outings and has not looked as "sure" as he had earlier in the year.

But the fact is, Evan Longoria is really, really good. He hit a homer. I'm not concluding much about Pestano's ability based on that.

7) Managerial Back-Patters

A loyal reader opined last night via Twitter that Chris Perez' velocity readings seem to be down, and he's concerned about the closer's health. I can't really speak to that, but I thought I'd mention it.

One thing I *do* like, though, is that Chris Perez does not pitch exclusively in Save Opportunities. Last night marked another outing in which he entered the game with a tie score and no hope of a save, and while he was rewarded with his second win on the season, I'm more encouraged about what this says about Acta than Perez. What it says is, "I'm not going to lose this game because I left one of my best options in the 'pen because it wasn't officially save-y." I have lost count as to how many times Royals fans lamented that they lost a game in late innings because someone of Jamey Wright's ilk was giving up the winning run while Joakim Soria sat for the fifth consecutive day because it wasn't a save op.

No, Acta is willing to get Perez in the game, and if he's really one of our best pitchers, then by golly that's exactly what should happen to maximize our chances of winning.

By the way, in his last 10 outings, Perez has given up a run in four of them. In three of these, he walked more hitters than he struck out (in the 4th, it was 1 apiece).

In the six scoreless outings, Perez did not walk more than he struck out.

Last night's game, in fact, marked the first scoreless outing in the last ten appearances in which he walked a batter.

I don't know about a "perfect correlation," but I will say this: Chris Perez gets better results when he does not walk hitters.

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(Here is where I would normally cajole Perez with a "Throw strikes!" epithet, but the fact is, after walking Damon, he recorded three outs without throwing another pitch that was not a strike. So I'm assuming he already knows.)

8) Walk this way

I should point out that while the Tribe drew 11 walks, it was by only six players. Each of Choo, Santana, Hafner, LaPorta, and Hannahan walked twice each.

The other walk was pretty big.

9) Good eye!

Ha ha! Just kidding.

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Don't get me wrong, Mike Brantley was down 0-2, and for all the abuse heaped on Kyle Farnsworth over the years, the man throws hard and came into the game with awesome stats. Brantley showed good patience to coax the game-winning walk.

But great Charlemagne's crumhorn, that was an atrocious pitch for ball four. It bounced in front of the plate! Vlad

Guerrero would have walked on that pitch.

(Note: Brantley was probably still cringing a bit from ball three, which was atrocious in its own way, nearly hitting him instead of bouncing.)

10) Only partially kidding

Hey, Mike, you got ball four, and that's great, but next time? Let that ball hit you, man.