

The B-List: 9/18

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, September 18 2006 7:00 PM -

Buff recaps last night's game in Oakland and chimes in on how annoying (but effective) Jake Westbrook is, pleads for Juan Lara to be used more, ponders why Jason Michaels even played last night, and more.



What could be nicer? Following the Tribe jumping out to a big early lead on the score scroller of the Monday Night Football game in which Pittsburgh is shut out and beaten up ... and seeing the White Sox lose at the same time ... did I mention I was a big fan of Schadenfreude?

1) My name is Jake; I annoy people

The great thing about facing Jake Westbrook is that you generally get pitches you hit; the bad thing is, you generally don't do it *well*. Westbrook did give up nine hits in 7 2/3 innings, but seven were singles and none left the yard. In addition, three baserunners were erased on groundball double plays. Westbrook gave up two runs, neither of which scored on a hit: one was the result of Hector Luna becoming confused by the large leather growth on his left hand, and the other was a sacrifice fly. He threw a bunch of pitches (120, 76 for strikes), but Jake's not a high-stress delivery guy nor particularly young any more and it doesn't bother me much (as long as it doesn't bother him, which few things seem to).

Two innings serve to illustrate Jake Westbrook in most of his splendor:

Bottom of the 3rd: *Ellis ground out to third Kendall ground out to second Kotsay*

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single to right

Bradley single to left

Thomas ground out to third

This shows two typical Westbrook features: the ground ball out (14 in all, along with 4 flies and a highish-for-Jake 5 Ks), and the single. For a guy with a 4.15 ERA, Westbrook can certainly give up his share of singles. And Miller's share. And Lara's share. And Perez' share. And it hurt him not one iota, except insofar as he threw 24 pitches that inning (although only 4 to the guys who got hits).

Bottom of the 1st: *Kendall ground out to second Kotsay single to center Bradley single to center, Kotsay to third*

Thomas 5-4-3 double play

This augments the singling feature by adding the Tightrope Element: the runner in scoring position with only one out. However, it adds the Double Play Feature, which is a sweet way to end the inning, since I still think of Frank Thomas as a White Sok. At this stage in his career, Frank Thomas could ground into a double play to shallow left, but it still gets you out of the inning without any scoring.

Jake got a few more swinging strikes than I'm used to, which suggests his stuff was moving (down) well.

2) Department of Efficiency Department

Coach, please, you've GOT to stop wearing Juan Lara to the nub like this! On the heels of a one-pitch outing, Lara was called in to face left-hander Eric Chavez and was forced to throw ANOTHER pitch, getting him to line out on the first pitch to end the 8th. If you're going to keep flogging him at such a pace, I think we all know what will happen.

Okay, that's facetious. It looks funny, that's all: "Pitch Count: 1"; I mean, it seems almost comical: even the most extreme matchup lefties like Mike Myers or Mike Venafro end up throwing a half-dozen pitches or so. (Heck Scott Sauerbeck threw 6 pitches.) And it made

perfect sense to bring Betancourt in to start the ninth with the right-hander Payton (2-for-3 on the night at that point) leading off the inning.

By the way, Betancourt needed to get three outs instead of one, so he threw FOUR pitches, making him over 33% less efficient than Mr. Lara.

3) Everybody gets on base!

And everyone but Jason Michaels did so by getting a base hit. Dan Haren wasn't particularly sharp, issuing 4 walks (1 intentional) to go with 9 hits in 4 2/3 innings, but the Indians also made him pay for mistakes, which is what you need to do with a struggling starter. Victor Martinez set the tone early with a two-run shot: he also added a double and two walks to reach base four times in five plate appearances. Blake, Peralta, and Marte joined Martinez in the two-hit club, Blake coming through with a big two-run double with the bases loaded and two outs in the 3rd to keep Haren from wriggling off the hook.

4) Managerial Head Scratchers

But why was Jason Michaels even there to not get a hit? Forget why he was in the two hole: I gave up explaining that one in July. No, I mean, why was he in the bloody lineup AT ALL? Is Shin-Soo Choo exhausted from his massive 9 ABs in the past week? Is Eric Wedge unhappy with the way his dog's hair has grown out?

Here's what I know about Michaels: he isn't good. He's not terrible, he's not Aaron Boone, but he isn't very good. As an everyday left fielder, he makes a decent platoon partner. As a platoon partner, he makes an excellent professional bowling commentator. I don't care about Jason Michaels any more, although I would like to see a picture of him someday sporting a neck.

And all of this kicks royal butt on what I know about Choo and Frank Gutierrez. I don't like Gutierrez' general lack of power. I don't care for Choo's propensity to strike out. But could I tell you with a straight face that they are important parts of the 2007 roster? No. Could I tell you

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with a straight face that they are NOT important parts of the 2007 roster? No. I happen to believe a Choo/Michaels platoon would be productive ... but so would a Choo/Blake platoon ... maybe a Choo/Goot platoon ... the possibilities are endless (as long as you can only count to five or so).

But letting Jason Michaels face a good right-handed starter in September 2006 is simply asinine.

5) Set off the fireworks!

Kevin Kouzmanoff drew a walk!

For a guy who ostensibly had good OBPs in the minors (and not just because of high batting averages, although they might have encouraged pitchers to pitch him more carefully), it's not very encouraging that it took 33 plate appearances for Kouzmanoff to draw a free pass.

6) Okay, this is getting creepy

Kevin Kouzmanoff went 1-for-4.

Kevin Kouzmanoff has played nine major-league baseball games, and has gone 1-for-4 in SIX of them. That's just weird.

At this rate, Kouz could start a fifteen-game hitting streak at .260 ... and *lower his batting average* .

7) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

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Grady Sizemore extended his hitting prowess against Oakland by going 2-for-4, including a double and a stolen base. He has 51 doubles and 22 SBs on the season, and is hitting .440 in his career in Oakland's home park.

Hector Luna atoned for his butchery with a solo shot: he also drove in a second run and scored twice.

8) Even with the ducks, it can be pretty peaceful with that annoying guy on the mound

Of the 11 men the Indians left on base, 7 were in scoring position, including leaving the bases loaded (Peralta) in the 3rd.