

Are we there yet? The Indians season is starting to drag, especially seeing as how the team has lost 7 of 10, and reached 80 losses last night. Two main themes in today's B-List, which examines the Indians 4-3 loss to the A's last night. The reconversion of Fausto Carmona to a starter, and how easy it is to second guess baseball managers.



Are we there yet?

1) Fausto!

Dexter: A musical of the Elephant Man? What's it called?

Mary: "Elephant";, I think - with an exclamation mark presumably. -- "The Tall Man";

I was as skeptical as anyone about the plan to jerk Fausto Carmona up and down and in and out of roles, sending him down to Beefalo after a brutal stint as closer to re-train himself to start, but his last two starts have been pretty darned effective. Last night, he was particularly economical (for Fausto), throwing 57 strikes in 84 pitches to get through 6 full innings. He scattered 6 hits (5 singles) and had a shutout brewing until the sixth, when Milton Bradley went yard for a solo shot. He walked two, but induced a double play and posted a nifty 10:5 GB:FB ratio.

For me, seeing an inning like the 2nd, where although he gave up two hits he pounded the strike zone and induced three groundouts to get out of the inning in only 11 pitches, are as encouraging as any other single pitching stat.

2) Requiem for the Second-Guessed

Second-guessing is probably the easiest fan activity available. It's easy to identify things that didn't go right, and not much harder to concoct a scenario in which different players or different actions might have yielded a different result. Any time a starter gives up a run over the 100-pitch mark, or an off-handed reliever gives up a big hit to the opposite-handed batter, or this guy contributes little while this other guy is on the bench, you can come up with a perfectly plausible scenario that says that the negative result could have been avoided by "simply doing the other thing."

Of course, much of this is cheap prattle. This isn't a simulation or even a well-defined system: sometimes Vlad Guerrero hits a ball off his shoetops for a homer, and sometimes the hard smash to short is a double play instead of a game-winning hit. The only truly safe second-guess involves Ramon Vazquez not playing.

This isn't to say that second-guessing has no value: early in the season, it was perfectly warranted to chide Eric Wedge for leaving starters in games too long, or to question whether Fausto was suited to closing, or whether Aaron Boone should be given regular ABs. These are things you could predict ahead of time, many did, and when the predicted negative result came

about, it deserved derision.

But all of this is kind of a long way of saying, sometimes you can make perfectly good decisions and still lose the game. And at the risk of defending Eric Wedge, the moves I saw last night, even the ones that didn't work, were ones I have no problem with.

Take lifting Carmona after the sixth. It could be argued that 84 pitches isn't a lot, and the home run to Bradley didn't show Lee-like bananization as much as Bradley hitting a home run. On the other hand, Ferd Cabrera should be able to pitch a scoreless seventh inning against a team sporting exactly one hitter with an average over .280 and *five* with averages under .260. And Ferd threw strikes, something I've ranted about in the past: 9 strikes in 12 pitches, no walks, a swinging K. He just got hit, and with only (two) singles at that.

Or take bringing in Juan Lara: Lara got his customary batter out with two strikes to bring up a two-out 1st-and-2nd situation with Milton Bradley coming to the plate. Bradley is a switch-hitter with virtually no platoon split, so there's no real advantage to bringing a right-hander out of the pen. And I've been screaming about letting Lara pitch more, anyway. Shouldn't we find out if Lara can get a right-handed hitter out, anyway? The fact that he gave up a single to Bradley seemed to stem as much from his reluctance to throw strikes (3 balls to Bradley after several no-ball outings) as any inability to get righties out. So I have no complaint here, although I'm disappointed Lara couldn't get out of the inning there. Now, bringing in Jason Davis (instead of, say, Betancourt) seems ripe for second-guessing, but even there, it would be nice to see if Davis can handle a later-inning role, as well as one calling for him to face hitters with runners on base. We have some data points, but not a lot: the fact that he gave up a two-run double to Frank Thomas probably tells us more about Frank Thomas than Jason Davis. Not the decision I would have made, but not a poor decision, either.

Bringing in Choo to pinch-hit for Marte against Street was kind of a no-win situation: Street's good, that's why he's the closer with 35 saves and a sub-3 ERA. Sure, Choo is coming off a sombrero, but that's a perfectly fine move. All in all, the manager's job is to put the players in situations that gives them and the team the best chance to succeed: after that, the **player** has to **act** **ually succeed**

3) Department of Not Surprise

On the lighter side, Kevin Kouzmanoff went 1-for-4.

4) Grudging respect mixed with a frustration headache

Rich Harden will be starting today, and he's going to be on something like a 60-pitch count. Oakland's going to need their bullpen today. And they used it pretty fiercely in the first two games of the series, since Haren was not sharp and Kirk Saarloos spent a lot of time striking out and walking Indians. So it was crucial for the A's to get a long outing out of Esteban Loaiza, who has recovered from a terrible start to the season to pitch pretty well lately. But really, Loaiza was a human sacrifice last night: had he given up 10 runs in the first, he'd still be trotted out there, because the bullpen simply could not bail him out.

Indians hitters, however, are another matter. Loaiza went 7 2/3, throwing 97 pitches, and winning his 11th of the season. He gave up only 5 hits and a walk to yield 3 runs, only 2 earned.

The thing is, it's easy to look at the game and say, "Why didn't they work him more? Wear him out!" The problem is, the Tribe did try to work him: Loaiza simply threw a lot of strikes and got people out. You can't just watch pitches go by and have them be called balls: they have to actually *be* out of the strike zone. If they're strikes, at some point, you have to swing.

Loaiza did a good job: we could have hit better, but you can't get on the Tribe's case for letting him off the hook. Still, it's *Esteban Loaiza*.

5) I'd be more impressed had it not been your fault in the first place

With the bases loaded and one out, Jason Davis bore down and got Jason Kendall (a reasonably fast runner, especially for a catcher) to ground into a 5-3 double play to end the 8th inning.

My congratulations would be more heartfelt had Davis not given up a double off the wall, walked Marcos Scutaro, and had to walk D'Angelo Jimenez intentionally after a sacrifice.

6) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

On a night where Loaiza and the 'pen limited the Tribe to 7 hits and a walk, it should be pointed out that both Grady Sizemore and Joltin' Joe Inglett had a pair of hits apiece. Sizemore doubled on the game's second pitch and, although erased trying to advance on a groundout, later singled and scored. Inglett accomplished exactly nothing on the basepaths, but he did have two hits, so there.

7) Ex-Tribe update

Luke Scott tripled in his third consecutive game for the Astros: he is now hitting .382 and has the highest average in the majors since July 13 (when he was called up from Round Rock). He is the first Astro to triple in back-to-back-to-back games since another ex-Tribesman, Ricky Gutierrez.

(The words "28-year-old rookie" tell you how legitimate I find the .382 average for Mr. Scott.)