

The B-List: 6/22

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Friday, June 24 2011 12:25 PM -

The Indians avoided the sweep on the strength of a fine start by Josh Tomlin, a homer by Travis Hafner, and yet another clearing-out by the bullpen. As the Tribe embarks on a 9-game National League road trip, the B-List looks at Tomlin's success, the bullpen hierarchy, a game full of no contact, potential from the middle of the order, blunderbussery from the Colorado rotation, one of the less-likely one-man shows in the majors, and the nature of mirrors.

Or something.

FINAL

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4

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Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
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Indians (40-33)

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2

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W: Tomlin (9-4)

L: Hammel (4-7) S: C. Perez (18)

So long, Sean Smith.



1) Duplicates

You know when you were a kid and you collected something in a series? For me, it was a set of stickers of football players you could get at a gas station (I have since forgotten which one: I want to say "Esso" or "Sunoco," which dates me pretty badly.)

I didn't know every player in the league by any stretch, but I knew Billy Kilmer from Fran Tarkenton.

So every time you got a set of stickers (they may have been cards: they are certainly long gone), you'd rush to your notebook, which helpfully showed the identities of the players you were still missing.

"Oh, Steve," the notebook would sigh wistfully.

"If only you had a Dan Pastorini, you would have a complete Houston Oilers offense."

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You'd fling open the notebook, and pull out your new stickers, and ... another Marv Hubbard.

You didn't even LIKE Marv Hubbard, and now you had two of them.

Or three of them.

Somehow I remember excess Marv Hubbards.

It may have been Joe Ferguson.

The point is, you had holes, and instead of filling the holes, you kept getting more of what you already had.

(And no, no one in my neighborhood would trade Dan Pastorini for six Marv Hubbards.)

Anyway, this is kind of how I feel going over the stats of another Josh Tomlin start, wondering if I've learned anything insightful yet. He didn't walk anyone, which is good, but he kind of does that a lot now. This is not a new data point. He struck out 3 in 6 1/3 innings, which isn't very good but is no longer very bad.

He gave up a pair of homers, which is a little worse than normal, but he certainly does that, too.

A backwards 6:10 GO:FO ratio.

60 strikes in 86 pitches, better than 2 in 3.

Fewer hits than innings pitched.

This is all pretty plowed ground.

I still don't understand exactly how Tomlin has the level of success he does, but this likely says more about me than it does about Tomlin.

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Here's one take-away, though: after getting banged around over a 4-game stretch in which he DID give up more hits than innings pitched and DID give up a bunch of runs, he either made an adjustment or two or caught a couple of NL teams at the right time. It's impossible to say for sure (well, for me at least: his "stuff" looked mostly the same to me, just located better).

But while I'm not willing to say, "See, he's back on track, Quality Start Machine here we come," I am willing to be encouraged by what appears to be a confident, focused Tomlin who controls the strike zone better than any other Cleveland pitcher.

One interesting side-effect of the high number of strikes Tomlin throws is that he has nearly the same number of innings as, say Justin Masterson, but throws about 14 fewer pitches PER GAME.

It's the fewest for any starter, and although Alex White was close, he averaged only 5 innings per start: Tomlin has never thrown fewer than 5 innings in his CAREER.

I still say he's Paul Byrd. Byrd was a LOT more hittable, but in 1997, Byrd gave up 27 homers and walked 28 hitters in 31 starts while averaging 91.5 pitches per start.

Josh Tomlin has given up 13 homers and walked 12 batters in 15 starts while averaging 91.1 pitches per start.

Can Tomlin do the double-clutch windup?

(Stay away from the HGH, kid.)

2) Pronk smash!

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We have to give him his due because we won't be seeing him much over the next week and a half. Still, his two-run shot left the ballyard in a HURRY.

3) The incredible shrinking ballgame

After Tomlin gave up a second tater to Ty Wigginton, who was pretty much the only guy who did much of anything against Tomlin, Manny Acta called on his bullpen with one out in the 7th inning.

Vinnie Pestano struck out his first hitter swinging.

Vinnie Pestano struck out his second hitter swinging.

Starting the 8th, Vinnie Pestano struck out his third hitter looking.

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Tony Sipp relieved to face the left-handed Carlos Gonzalez, whom he ... struck out swinging.

Yes, Sipp allowed a fly ball out and Chris Perez gave up a double to the Invincible Sean Smith, but the double came after two MORE swinging Ks by Perez of Jason Giambi and Troy Tulowitzki. AND he got Ty Wigginton out, which made him about 9000% more effective than Josh Tomlin in that regard.

There will be some nights in which the starter gets shelled and has to leave early, and there will be other nights in which certain pitchers have had to work several games in a row and are unavailable, but with a decent amount of rest and a decent length from the starter, I feel awfully good when the Indians lead after 6 innings.

Note: this requires the offense to score runs.

4) Ducks on ... um ... your pond appears somewhat duckless

Fun stat: the Colorado Rockies did not have a plate appearance with someone in scoring position off Josh Tomlin. However, Ty Wigginton did homer twice, mitigating this a bit.

For the game, the Rockies were 0-for-1 with runners in scoring position. The out was made by Ty Wigginton.

5) Encouraging signs

Shin-Soo Choo hit his 10th double of the season. It came off a left-handed reliever who had stuck out 37 Indians over the course of the series.

Travis Buck not only got a hit, it too was for extra bases. Well, extra base: it was a double. He also drew a walk, which I think is encouraging for a guy who just came off an 0-for-24 slump and got sent down for an hour or so and then got such a huge burst of positive feedback for stroking a late game-tying single: THAT guy I'd kind of expect to press and come out swinging out of his shoes.

The walk suggests that Buck is a professional with a pro's approach to the game.

His OBP is currently lousy, but you can't raise your OBP 70 points in one game unless it's your

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third game or so.

Grady Sizemore got a hit with a guy in scoring position and was rewarded with an RBI. Grady hitting makes the team better.

I am not sanguine about this prospect, but a good game is good.

6) Hazard pay

I am all for Cord Phelps playing more second base, and it's been nice to have Orly Cabrera on the roster this season, but for the love of chocolate chips, Orly Cabrera does not look comfortable playing third base. I'm not pokin' fun at him here, I actually feel for the guy.

(His OBP is worse than Buck's.)

7) Not my favorite strategy

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Jason Hammel faced 27 hitters, walking 5 and striking out 4, meaning that fully a third of the hitters he faced did not end the plate appearance by making contact.

Of course, fully 100% of Vinnie Pestano's hitters did that, but starters are supposed to be less fascist.

8) Amusing thought

Jack Hannahan's offensive numbers at first base.