

The B-List: 7/7

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Friday, July 08 2011 2:15 PM -

Zach McAllister made his major-league debut last night, but nobody is going to remember that. □

Lonnie Chisenhall got hit in the face with a pitch last night, but nobody is going to remember that, either, especially not Lonnie Chisenhall, who awoke this morning saying, "What the heck happened to my face?!"

The Indians stranded 9 runners by going 0-for-8 with runners in scoring position through the first 8 innings, and the number of people who care about that today is zero.

No one is going to remember much about the first 8 innings of this game.

FINAL

1

2

3

4

5

6

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7

8

9

R

H

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Blue Jays (42-47)

0

1

0

2

0

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0

0

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1

4

11

0

Indians (47-39)

0

0

0

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0

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0

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5

5

10

2

W: Sipp (4-1)

L: L. Perez (1-2)

That was pretty amazing..



1) Pronk smash!

And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,

And now the air is shattered by the force of Hafner's blow.

Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright;

The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light,

And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout;

*But there is **great** joy in Cleveland — mighty Hafner says, “F&\$* you!”.*

With one out in the bottom of the 9th, the bases loaded, the score 4-1, and a left-handed pitcher on the mound, Travis Hafner unloaded on an elevated inside fastball and drove it far enough over the wall as to scare parking lot attendants. The resultant grand slam ended the game, and everyone went insane.

The end.

2) Suspension of disbelief

The thing is, to GET to the point where Hafner COULD be the hero, a Casey-like series of relatively improbable events had to take place. It looked like the 8th inning was set up much better for the Indians to score, but Orly Cabrera bounced into a double play, meaning that the 9th would be the 7-8-9 hitters.

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These three men sport OBPs as follows:

Travis Buck: .294
Matt LaPorta: .311

Jack Hannahan: .308

Using brutal (and likely not entirely accurate) probability, the odds of all three men reaching base were roughly 2.8%. The point is, these guys hit 7-8-9 because there are more productive hitters in the 1-through-6 slots. Well, 1-through-4 slots. 5 and 6 are kind of in the same boat as 7-through-9.

Y'know, it occurs to me that putting up 5/9ths of a lineup with OBPs hovering around .300, it's not really all that surprising when the scores are low.

Anyway, Buck hit a 1-2 pitch up the middle for a single, and LaPorta HAMMERED a ball the other way for a double in the corner on the very next pitch. After that, Professional Hitter Jack hannahan was able to work a walk from what appeared to be a rattled Frank Francisco.

Now, Frank Francisco is not a guy you're going to mistake for "calm and cool." This is generally fine in a late-inning reliever: such guys often have that "hair on fire" demeanor.

Vinnie Pestano and Chris Perez do not strike me as calm, placid men when they are on the mound.

(Off the mound, they seem more calm.

ON the mound, they seem like gentlemen who chew metal.)

And, of course, if you asked the average fan for one fact about Frank Francisco, it would be the chair-throwing incident he had in a stint as a Texas Ranger.

True to form, reportedly after the game he asked reporters if they wanted to talk, then when answered affirmatively, dropped some F-bombs and stormed off.

Anyway, Francisco did not pitch tremendously well and he appeared from the lay perspective to handle it extraordinarily poorly.

Also, he walked Jack Hannahan.

Now, Luis Perez is having a good season, especially against left-handed hitters. Mike Brantley struck out on a full count, but this sort of thing happens with Luis Perez on the mound.

Asdrubal Cabrera, batting from the right side, lifted a "tennis shot" single into left.

And then Hafner unloaded on what wasn't really a very good pitch.

But the point is, it took the 7-8-9 guys getting on base, and then Brantley not hitting into a double play, and then Cabrera to get on base, too, to set up Hafner's heroics. I, for one, had not bet on this.

3) Welcome to the club! Now go away!

That's not an entirely fair characterization of Zach McAllister's debut, but it was planned and understood that McAllister would make the spot start then head back to AAA for more seasoning. While it's fun to wishcast McAllister as taking the world by storm and pulling a Josh Tomlin 2010 in place of, say, Mitch Talbot for the remainder of the season, this isn't a very realistic projection.

He's had a nice season in AAA thus far ... make that a *terrific* season ... but Jeanmar Gomez and David Huff have also looked extremely good in Columbus of late.

Without more evidence of stuff or something else, there's not a lot of reason to expect his major-league performance right now to trump those of Gomez and Huff.

(As an aside, I have read that Huff has a new cutter that makes him more effective. I will always have a soft spot for left-handed starters, and would love for this to be true, but I will reserve judgement and simply report it as something I've read.)

McAllister's first inning was just about as good as it could have been. He struck out Yoon Escobar twice before he grounded out (the 0-2 and 2-2 pitches were strikes, I say).

He struck out two other hitters more effectively.

And he walked Jose Bautista on a full count, which seems prudent seeing that Bautista is possibly the best hitter in the major leagues, and it wasn't like McAllister was ducking him: Bautista swung and missed at one pitch and fouled two more off.

On the good side of the ledger, McAllister gave up only 2 earned runs in 4 innings and struck out 4 hitters. None of his 5 hits allowed was for extra bases, and he gave up 2 runs in the 4th on a series of four bleeders and bloopers.

With the bases loaded, he got Jose Bautista to ground out (although it might have been the hardest-hit groundout in the world, it was still an out and it was still on the ground).

That takes some guts, moxie, and actual talent to boot.

On the negative side, he sports a 2.00 WHIP after allowing 5 hits and 3 walks in just 4 innings of work. He needed 93 pitches to get there, and gave up 3 runs overall while making an error. If you're talking objectively about what is reasonable to expect from an emergency sport start, 4 innings and 3 runs falls slightly short of the mark, but isn't that far from being really valuable.

Anyway, I'm not a scout and can't even tell you what McAllister's repertoire is (it looks like he has some late movement on a mediocre fastball). But he did okay given the circumstances; on the flip side, I'm not clamoring for him to stay in the bigs, either.

4) Ducks on the pond!

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Yeah, I lied, I'm TOTALLY going to remember the 9 guys left on base and the 0-for-8 with RISP and loading the bases AGAIN and not scoring any runs AGAIN. We're really not that good a group of hitters to let bases loaded go to waste like that.

The Sizemore/Orly duo was particularly painful in this regard, going a combined 0-for-5 (2 for Grady, 3 for Orly) with runners in scoring position.

Every other player in the lineup either got a hit or was beaned in the face.

5) Not the face!

I wish the best for Lonnie Chisenhall, and he didn't look badly hurt as he walked off the field (that is, he didn't look like he'd fractured an orbital bone or anything like that). But the man was hit by a pitch in the
face

.

I am not expecting him to play again before the All-Star break..

6) Welcome back!

To offset the "loss" of Bob Phelps (optioned to AAA to make room for McAllister), Luis Valbuena

has been called up from Columbus, a move made all the more necessary by Chisenhall's beaming. I hope that this represents a new beginning for Valbuena, because the old one sucked very large rocks. By all reports, he has improved significantly as a hitter, and I would welcome that. I would also not BET on it.

7) Flashing the leather

Jack Hannahan made an excellent stop and throw at third base to help keep the Indians in the game. Also, Asdrubal Cabrera's backhanded grab of Bautista's bases-loaded grounder wasn't necessarily *spectacular*, but it was a nice play that was awfully crucial.

8) Another win for Johnny Wholestaff

After McAllister was forced to leave after four innings, the bullpen took over in what has become their inimitable fashion. While Raffy Perez gave up a pair of hits, he also whiffed two in two scoreless innings. Chad Durbin kicked in a perfect frame, and Frank Herrmann and Joe Smiff combined for a scoreless 8th.

I will say this about Frank Herrmann: they are not always the most effective or the highest quality, but the man does throw strikes.

Tony Sipp was not entirely effective, but giving up a home run to Jose Bautista no longer seems like a very newsworthy event.

9) The value of the “Win” stat for relievers

Is nil.

10) Managerial Head-Scratchers

Look, we have arguably the best bullpen in the game and we’ve established that Manny Acta is a much better manager than I would be. I accept this. But clue me in here: Joe Smiff retired a batter in the 8th. The next two hitters are:

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LHB Eric Thames
RHB Jose Bautista

I think it is a given that getting a same-handed matchup is a valuable thing here. Thames is a pretty good hitter, especially for a guy I've not heard of.

But which do you think is more likely to hurt more: Joe Smiff pitching to Eric Thames, or Tony Sipp pitching to Jose Bautista? I mean, this isn't hindsight, this is simply recognizing Bautista's place as the most dangerous (.333/.467/.691 !) hitter in the game.

Note: I am overlooking the possibility that Tony Sipp has told Manny Acta that he is a lot more comfortable starting innings than coming into the game in the middle of an inning, or that Joe Smiff went to Manny and said, "I don't feel all that great, skip." These are the things that make him the manager and me the fan.

But it's the second time in the last few games I thought the original guy could be stretched through a bad matchup to get to a good one instead of bringing in someone for a good matchup that immediately becomes bad the next hitter (cf. Pestano v. Granderson).