

## The B-List: 7/18

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Tuesday, July 19 2011 12:28 PM -

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*The Indians rebounded after dropping two to lowly Baltimore to take two from the lowly but still threatening Twins. The Tribe got outstanding starts from David Huff, who has been dead for tax reasons, and Fausto Carmona, who has been awful for many reasons, as well as home runs in spacious Not the Metrodome from Asdrubal Cabrera, Austin Kearns, and Tofu Lou Marson, two of whom would have been considered less likely to homer in Minnesota than ... just about anyone else.*

**FINAL**

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## The B-List: 7/18

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Tuesday, July 19 2011 12:28 PM -

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**Indians (50-44)**

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## The B-List: 7/18

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Tuesday, July 19 2011 12:28 PM -

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**Twins (44-50)**

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## The B-List: 7/18

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Tuesday, July 19 2011 12:28 PM -

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W: Huff (1-0)

L: Swarzak (2-3)

S: Pestano (2)

**FINAL**

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### Indians (51-44)

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## The B-List: 7/18

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### Twins (44-51)

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## The B-List: 7/18

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W: Carmona (5-10)

L: S. Diamond (0-1)

So ... I ... uh ... I wasn't expecting that.



## 1) Return of the Prodigal

If there is any player in the Indians' organization who would have way more than justifiable cause to block me on Twitter, it would be David Huff. If there were a "Set fire to that guy's account" setting, it wouldn't be stretch to say that Huff could flip that switch and few would think it excessive. I have not been nice to David Huff.

It should be pointed out, of course, that the cheap shots were obvious ones, and that most of what I've written about my frustration with his performance is genuine, honest, and (most damningly) accurate. Huff has, to date, NOT been an effective major-league pitcher. He has not thrown enough strikes, and he has given up too many gopher balls.

His career major-league ERA, WHIP, and ISO allowed are very high.

He has not shown a real "out" pitch and he has fared poorly against left-handers and right-handers alike.

David Huff has been bad, and has seemed somewhat obstinate in doing so.

And while it seemed like a bit of an overreaction to his Twitter mishap to prevent Huff from making any further appearances in 2010, it didn't cause many fans to rail against its injustice, either. No one missed David Huff at the end of last year, not with Carlos Carrasco and Josh Tomlin showing Flashes of Better. Tomlin seemed to KNOW how to pitch much better than Huff, and Carrasco seemed to BE able to pitch much better than Huff.

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---

As Jim Palmer used to say: velocity, location, movement.

Pick two.

Huff picked zero.

So whether it was in response to a behind-closed-doors chastising, or a magical cutter-teaching guru who came down from the Los Angeles Mountains, or whatever it was, it was with cautious optimism that Tribe fans watched Huff get off to a solid start in Columbus. He seemed more composed, more humble, but more than anything ... HE PITCHED BETTER.

I am  
*all for*  
the mental side of the game.

I am  
*all for*  
role models and that sort of thing.

I  
*demand*  
the players on my team be able to PLAY.

Huff's stats in AAA have been uniformly excellent, including a better K rate that suggests he is *en route* to developing better STUFF.

I'm not a scout and cannot tell you one way or the other.

Put me in against ANY major-league pitcher and the only way I reach base is via the walk or HBP, and if hit with a major-league pitch, I would cry.

Yes, literally  
*cry*

## The B-List: 7/18

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Tuesday, July 19 2011 12:28 PM -

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I have few illusions about my major-league skills.

Called up to spot-start for the Indians in the day/night doubleheader, Huff began the game with a first inning that could easily have led to Very Bad Things: after a strike to Joe Mauer with two outs, Huff missed three straight times before getting a couple of foulofts and then yielding a single. Falling behind 3-1, same old David Huff. And the next hitter, righty Mike Cuddyer, same thing: strike one, balls one, two, and three.

While waiting for the inevitable extra-base hit to the righty with a runner on base, Cleveland fans exhaled a little when Cuddyer watched strike two and swung through strike three.

In the second, after getting Jim Thome to swing and miss at two pitches, Huff lost him, but y'know, in retrospect, Jim Thome does walk on occasion. After falling behind 3-1 to Drew Butera, Huff got Butera to ground into an inning-ending double play.

And then ... Huff kinda cruised.

Were there too many three-ball counts? Of course there were, especially those after starting 0-1. This isn't going to stop driving me crazy just because Huff tossed 7 scoreless innings and the Indians won.

## The B-List: 7/18

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Tuesday, July 19 2011 12:28 PM -

---

I still hate whatever thought process it is that tells David Huff that throwing three straight pitches out of the strike zone is ever a good idea.

But Huff allowed only 5 hits in 7 innings, never two in the same innings, and struck out 5 against 2 walks for a brisk 2.5 K:BB ratio and a 1.00 WHIP.

It took Huff only 88 pitches to get through the 7 innings, and curiously, Huff got 10 groundball outs to 6 in the air (although four of those came in a pair of Butera GIDPs).

Not only did he strike out five hitters, he actually got more swings-and-misses (9) than foul balls (8).

The Twins had five opportunities to hit with a runner in scoring position off Huff, and they went 0-for-5.

Did he give up two hits to left-handed Joe Mauer?

Sure.

Did he give up a double to Del Young, who slugs .354?

Yep.

Does he deserve praise for throwing a real, high-quality game?

Indeed he does.

**2) Welcome (way) back!**

## The B-List: 7/18

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Tuesday, July 19 2011 12:28 PM -

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Fausto Carmona returned from the disabled list after suffering perhaps the most humiliating on-field injury seem in quite a while. Since Carmona has not actually been what pundits like to call “any damned good” this season, my expectations were low.

There were a number of things about this start that weren't entirely tremendous: giving up a homer to Danny Valencia qualifies as “sub-tremendous,” and starting fewer than half the batters he faced with a first-pitch strike wasn't very desirable, either.

A funny thing happened on the way toward another desultory loss, though: Carmona pitched pretty damned well.

I guess the thing that leaps out at me in the box score is the K:BB ratio of 1:0. That's right: 1. And that's also right: 0.

One strikeout in 6 innings pitched seems pretty lame, but if it comes coupled with ZERO walks from Carmona, who has struggled with command this season, it may be a decent tradeoff.

See, the thing this low walk:strikeout combination reminds me of as much as anything is the kind of totals Carmona posted in his earliest days as an Indian, before and after his ill-fated closing stint. Carmona would routinely go deep into ballgames, getting a high number of

## The B-List: 7/18

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---

ground balls, but never missing any bats at all.  
grand total of THREE swings-and-misses last night.

Sure enough, Carmona induced a

And, truth be told, his 10:7 GO:FO ratio is nothing special. This is quite a bit lower than his customary 14:3 or whatever he was posting regularly in 2007 or so.

While I'm always a fan of More Ground Balls and More Missed Bats, sort of on general principle, the closest thing to a "rally" Carmona allowed the Twins was a double-single-single combo in the 3

rd

, and that produced exactly one run.

After the second single, Carmona recorded two straight outs to end the inning, and 7 in a row until a single in the 5

th

.

Not only did Carmona get out of that jam without a lot of consternation, but he didn't let it turn into an

**Inning of Crap™**

that has undone him so frequently this season.

Since this raises his record to 5-10 and lowers his ERA to 5.63, neither of which is a number you want from ANY rotation member, I am far from claiming that Fausto's struggles are behind him and he's ready to move to top half of the rotation. One start will not accomplish this. It was enjoyable, though.

### 3) Drooby Doo and Tofu Lou!

## The B-List: 7/18

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Tuesday, July 19 2011 12:28 PM -

---

The first game did not feature a great deal of offense from either team, but in the third inning, after consecutive singles by Zeq Carrera and Mike Brantley, Asdrubal Cabrera launched a three-run shot to right that effectively put the game out of reach for the punchless Twins.

In the second game, immediately following Carmona allowing the game-tying homer, Tofu Lou Marson led off the top of the 7<sup>th</sup> with a mammoth blast to the deepest part of the ballpark (just to the LF side of dead center) to put the Indians ahead to stay. They would score more runs, but that homer seized momentum from Minnesota. Th

Also, I literally did not know that Marson could hit the ball that far.

Or pull the ball.

Lou does not pull the ball.

### 4) Great moments in pinch-running

After hitting an RBI single off left-handed reliever Chuck James, Travis Hafner was pulled from the game in favor of Luis Valbuena. Valbuena is clearly faster than Travis Hafner at this (or, in fact, likely *any*) point in his career, and the most made fine sense in that he was a lot more likely to score from first on a double, or wind his way around on a pair of hits.

I may be going out on a limb here, but I think that Valbuena and Hafner were probably *equally* likely to score on Carlos Santana's subsequent *triple*

*(To be explicit, it's still a good move. I was simply amused by the circumstance.)*

## **5) Role-playing**

Mike Brantley was not my favorite player in June, posting a paltry .231/.281/.337 line, primarily out of the leadoff slot. While I demand fewer things of my leadoff hitter than most, I demand more of those things as well. OBP is life. Get on base.

So it is with real pleasant surprise that Brantley appears to have gotten back on the proverbial horse in July, putting up a .338/.360/.437 line thus far, including 5 extra-base hits, 10 RBI and 3 stolen bases without getting caught. Since the All-Star Break, he's a scorching 12-for-27, good

## The B-List: 7/18

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Tuesday, July 19 2011 12:28 PM -

---

for a .444/.444/.556 line in a completely meaningless sample size.

Still, the man have FIVE multi-hit games in SIX; going back to count the Toronto series, Brantley has 7 multi-hit games in 10 and is hitting 19-for-47 (.404) over that stretch.

(He went 3-for-4 and 2-for-4 yesterday.)

Is this just a hot streak? Who the hell cares? Our options at leadoff now consist of Mike Brantley and Mike Brantley. I vote we slot Brantley in there and see how he does.

### 6) What about Zeq?

I am very happy with the contribution Zeq Carrera has made thus far. With no major-league experience to speak of and a limited skill set that spells "fifth outfielder/defensive replacement," Carrera has done a fine job fielding the position, drew a walk in each of the two games, beat out a hit, stole his first and second career major-league bases in the two games (one in each), and scored three runs total over the pair.

Zeq Carrera's OBP is .273. His ISO is zero point zero. He is not currently a good choice for a leadoff hitter. Let us maintain SOME realism in our expectations here.

## The B-List: 7/18

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Tuesday, July 19 2011 12:28 PM -

---

### 7) Captains Clutch

While Travis Hafner probably deserves special mention for lacing a pair of RBI singles in three trips to the plate with a runner in scoring position in the nightcap, consider this collective performance with RISP:

Day

Brantley: 1-1

A. Cabrera: 1-2

Carrera: 1-1

Night

Brantley: 1-1

Hafner: 2-3

A. Cabrera: 1-3

Overall, the Indians went 7-for-15 (3-for-5 + 4-for-10) with RISP over the two games. The Twins went a collective 1-for-12.

## The B-List: 7/18

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Tuesday, July 19 2011 12:28 PM -

---

### 8) Back to Normalcy

Tony Sipp pumped 16 strikes in 21 pitches to complete a perfect 8<sup>th</sup> in the day game.

Vinnie Pestano recorded his second save with 10 strikes in 15 pitches, a 1-2-3 inning, and 1 K.

Raffy Perez induced four straight groundouts in relief of Fausto Carmona.

Joe Smiff allowed two feeble grounders, one of which became a hit only because it was EXTRA feeble. He threw 9 strikes in 11 pitches and struck out a hitter to finish the scoreless 8<sup>th</sup>.

Chris Perez did allow a solo shot in the 9<sup>th</sup>, but few cared besides the Plouffe Family, to whom I tip my hat.  
Huzzah, Plouffes various and sundry!

## **9) Thumper Rule**

Chad Durbin.

## **10) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.**

Austin Kearns walloped a solo shot in the day game, and went 1-for-3 with a walk in the nightcap.

Luis Valbuena and Lonnie Chisenhall each scored a run through no real achievement of their own.

## The B-List: 7/18

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Tuesday, July 19 2011 12:28 PM -

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Carlos Santana and Lou Marson each caught a game in sweltering conditions and did not die. That's actually harder than it sounds.

(It looked miserable.)