

The B-List: 7/25

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Tuesday, July 26 2011 3:04 PM -

After seemingly blowing the game on one pitch in the 8th inning, the Indians came back with a dramatic 3-2 win on Jason Kipnis' first major-league hit.

It would be hard to make some of this stuff up.

In today's B-List, Buff looks at the surprising and/or transitory and/or inevitable success of Fausto Carmona, a trip around the bullpen, the thought processes of Manny Acta, and the evil meanness of Dan Haren.

Welcome to the big club, indeed, Jason Kipnis.

Huzzah!

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Indians (52-48)

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W: Sipp (5-2)

L: Walden (2-3)

Some pitches are better than others.



1) I predict the next random integer will be 32!

What are we to make of Fausto Carmona at this point?

In each of his last three starts that did not involve a pratfall at first base, Carmona has tossed a Quality Start of exactly six innings, giving up 3, 2, and 0 runs in the process. He isn't striking anyone out (4, 1, and 3), and actually seems to struggle with his command (3, 0, and 3 walks ... remember, in SIX innings).

However, he's not all that hittable, his overall results are good, and he's keeping the ball in the

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park (1 HR in the three games).

Considering he'd given up at least one homer in EACH of the previous SIX starts before that, this might qualify as "progress."

And, of course, it's all light comedy when Carmona channels his Inner Bob Wolcott and sweats through a uniform shirt every inning as he did last night and the start before in Minnesota. But in July, he actually has a 1.29 ERA with a 1.14 WHIP, which is awfully good.

Here's the thing: he looks EXACTLY THE SAME. It's not that his slider has more bite. It's not that his sinker has more sink.

It's not that he's throwing more strikes, or walking fewer hitters, or turning into a peach cobbler, or anything I can tell as a lay fan.

His stuff looked better than his results before, and his stuff looks worse than his results now.

His stuff looks like his stuff.

His results are all over the map.

I have no interesting analysis that tells you what he's likely to do next.

It should be noted that FanGraphs recently posted an article talking about the 10 pitchers that ERA estimators like FIP and SIERRA like more than the actual results to date, and Carmona tops the list. According to his base stats and peripheral (like hits, walks, homer rate, line drive percentage, all that rot), he "should" be a pitcher with an ERA in the low 4s instead of one in the mid 5s. In fact he is the pitcher with THE single biggest gap between "projection"

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and “actual.” So there is something to the contention that Carmona has been, to this point in the season, a bit unlucky, and that he still throws quality stuff.

On the other hand, I have watched the games. I have seen the pitches. There are times when Carmona simply loses contact with the material world.

There are pitches that are hard to explain without a knuckleball or a tub of lard being involved.

There are some truly execrable sequences that get out of hand extremely quickly.

I am telling you, Fausto Carmona’s struggles cannot all be attributed to “unfortunate outcomes.”

Some of them can only be attributed to “pitching badly.”

I guess if anything, the takeaway of the last couple starts is twofold:

a) Carmona appeared to be extra deliberate in these starts, taking extra time between pitches, and extra time between batters. If this is something that helps he stay in touch with the current version of spacetime, I’m all for it. And it may even be something sustainable and repeatable.

(It may not.)

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b) There is no reason to talk about “dumping” Carmona either to wishcast a tasty prospect or unload a still-reasonable salary. Fausto Carmona can pitch. He DOESN'T always DO it, but he CAN. And I'd certainly rather bet that teaching him to breathe through his eyelids or whatever it takes will yield better results than throwing whatever version of Jeanmar Gomez or Zach McAllister we have lying around out there would. Take the guy with a ceiling.

All of this is a bit circumspective way of saying, “Carmona pitched very well on a night in which Dan Haren was beating us with so many stout sticks.” I didn't like the three walks. I could have used more that 61% strikes.

I'd lobby for more ground ball outs than those in the air.

But 4 hits, no runs, and holding the opponent to 0-for-6 with RISP is something that will win you some ballgames.

2) Nothing Ball

Within the first three hitters, the Indians had scored a run on two hits. They went 1-for-1 with runners in scoring position.

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In the 9th inning, the Indians scored two runs on three hits, a walk, and an HBP. They went 2-for-4 with runners in scoring position.

For the game, the Indians scored three runs on six hits and went 3-for-5 with runners in scoring position.

The offensive activity of innings 2 through 8 are left as an exercise to the reader.

3) Vinnie, Vidi, Victus

Bobby Abreu is usually held up by statheads as the quintessential underappreciated ballplayer.

Throughout his career, he has hit some home runs, but not a LOT of home runs.

He has stolen some bases, but not a LOT of stolen bases.

He has pretty high batting averages, but not REALLY high batting averages.

He HAS posted some damned high OBPs, but no one really remembers that sort of thing unless it's someone on your team.

He played in Philadelphia when they weren't good enough, and Houston when they weren't

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good at all, and plays right field like an agoraphobe, and is built vaguely like a refrigerator or a block of cheese.

He had one run in the Home Run Derby, but most people will tell you that Bobby Abreu is pretty good, when in fact he's been really, really good.

(I would wager that roughly 35 in 100 casual fans would correctly identify the Angels as the team Bobby Abreu plays for now.)

Part of the reason that Abreu is considered "underappreciated" is that his skill set is not sexy at all. One of the things Abreu does as well as anyone is Not Swing. Bobby Abreu is a MASTER of Not Swinging. He makes Carlos Santana look like Gary DiSarcina.

Bobby Abreu does not swing.

Okay, that's a bit of an overstatement, but early in the count, Abreu does not swing.

I read from someone I trust that Bobby Abreu swings at fewer than 8% of the first pitches he gets.

If you want to make Bobby Abreu fish for a pitch out of the zone, don't do it early in the count.

I am moderately convinced that Bobby Abreu is actually asleep for the first three pitches of any plate appearance.

Do you know when Bobby Abreu WILL swing early in the count? When you throw the World's Fattest Belt High Gravy Dripping Instant Homer Can't Miss Super Wallop Fastball on the inner half of the plate after falling behind 1-0 on a pitchout.

Yeah, if you throw that slop up there, Bobby Abreu will hit that pitch.

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Where will he hit it? He will hit it over the wall.

4) Managerial Head-Scratchers

Why is Vinnie Pestano pitching to Bobby Abreu, anyway? Was Raffy Perez dead?

5) Postscript

Tony Sipp, a left-handed reliever, earned the win with a perfect inning of relief, throwing 10 strikes in 11 pitches.

6) Managerial Happy Accidents

I did not think of the following, but rather heard it third-hand through Tony Lastoria on Twitter last night:

If Orly Cabrera had not pinch-run for Travis Hafner, he almost certainly would have been called on to pinch-hit for either Travis Buck or Jason Kipnis against the lefty Takahashi. Since he can play second base and not the outfield, Kipnis was the more likely candidate.

(Of course, it may have been that Acta would have preferred Kipnis against a decent lefty than Orly against a power righty that the Angels could have brought in. We're approaching angels and pinheads territory here.)

7) Magical Timing

Jason Kipnis joined Bob Phelps in the group of rookie second basemen who have ended a Cleveland win with a walkoff hit.

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He also joined Zeq Carrera in the group of hitters whose first career major-league hit drove in a run.

So really, it was hardly anything unusual.

8) Because print is a toneless medium

I'm kidding. Huzzah, Jason Kipnis!

9) Ho Hum Dept.

Joe Smiff pitched a perfect inning of relief. He needed 8 pitches because he struck out a batter.

10) Pronk smash!

Of course, Kipnis' heroics likely don't come to the fore were it not for Travis Hafner's game-tying blow, an opposite-field double that drove in Mike Brantley from second. It was Hafner's only hit of the game. That worked out okay.

11) High-quality Plate Appearances

Carlos Santana may have shown good patience in not swinging at any of the four pitches Jordan "Pond" Walden threw out of the zone, but I think special mention must be saved for Jack Hannahan's savvy veteran gritty clutchiness to show remarkable inertia in allowing himself to be struck on the ankle with an 0-2 pitch. Now THAT'S leadership!

12) Who the hell scores runs off Dan Haren?!

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Dan Haren has a 3.01 ERA. I have no idea why. I never, never, never, never want to see Dan Haren pitch against the Indians again. Not
once.

No.