

Morning Rundown: Lower Than You Possibly Thought

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Wednesday, May 16 2012 6:31 AM - Last Updated Wednesday, May 16 2012 7:48 AM



The Indians first move this offseason? Heck, the first move of the entire offseason? It was the acquisition of Derek Lowe. The first trade may just have been one of the best trades that any team made and it hadn't been any clearer than on Tuesday afternoon.

May 15th, 2012

Cleveland Indians - **5**

Minnesota Twins - **0**

W: Derek Lowe (6-1) L: Jason Marquis (2-3)

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[BOXSCORE]

No really, stop. It's likely most of the people patting Antonetti on the back are ones who mocked him. Not necessarily calling it a bad trade, but simply saying "well what good is this going to do us?!" It seems like all of a sudden though everyone is patting Chris Antonetti and the Tribe on the back for the swap that sent reliever Chris Jones to Atlanta in exchange for **Derek Lowe** and, most of his contract paid for. Well...Stop.

Uh, a month and a half in, six wins, that's what. And if you didn't mock, you are late to the party. Lowe's been doing this all year and it just took a complete game shutout against the Twins for you to realize it? D-Lowe has been a godsend to this rotation as he's been the stopper of potential losing streaks and a groundball machine. He feeds a hungry infield defense and the rest of the starters could stand to learn a few things.

With the struggles of Justin Masterson early on, a consistent Lowe has saved this team. And against a, quite honestly, horrific looking Twins lineup, [he did what he was supposed to do](#) .

"He was a ground-ball machine the whole day," Indians manager Manny Acta said. "I don't keep track of every game I've ever watched or anything like that, but I don't think I've seen too many complete-game shutouts without a strikeout. That's rare to see. He was great. Every time he needed a pitch, he got it."

The last time that happened? Scott Erickson, a former Twin, did it against the Royals when he was with Baltimore in 2002. He walked just two and gave up four hits in the nine innings he pitched for a complete game shutout. Lowe walked four and gave up six hits, but he got the job done getting a double play in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and for good measure one in the ninth.

So many groundballs, and now he leads the league in groundouts and double plays. Lowe said he didn't throw a whole lot of breaking balls (and [Brooks Baseball says](#) he only threw 12 pitches that weren't sinkers), settling for mostly fastballs that would sink. It may be the same pitch, but you can't beat a fastball that goes down with the occasional changeup mixed in every once-and-a-while.

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"Sometimes if you deviate from throwing fastballs, you give them a break. You just want to keep going at it until they make a big enough adjustment to make you change your plan." ☐

Lowe says that his start has been gratifying and that he's worked so hard just to put to rest the questions about him retiring and "being done" or, blah blah.

And that's probably what I like most about Derek Lowe on this team. If you've read me for a long time, you know I'm a big proponent (founded or not, valid or not) of veteran leadership on a team and I believe you can never have too much of it.

It's not so much the veteran leadership as it is the laid back, "I'm just here to play baseball" type attitude Lowe has. He talks and he just talks. Yeah there were so many questions, are you done, are you going to retire, blah blah. Blah Blah? Who says that in response? Only someone who is just showing up to do his job and takes the rest for what it is.

Show me the mound, let me pitch, let's go, I'll talk to you later and when I do, it's just a conversation.

It's not the veteran leadership, it's the attitude, the way he seems to carry himself (Lou Marson called him the best teammate he's ever had), the genuine outlook he has about his starts (he'll tell you he sucked and why he sucked). It's just all there and it would hard not be for someone who's pitched as long as he has.

The trade aside. The trade aside was a no-brainer when all you were looking for was a veteran arm. Derek Lowe's available? He wasn't really Lowe-like last year? Eh.. You'll pay most of his contract?

Um, yes. Even if he doesn't pan out completely like you'd hope him to, the reward outweighs the risk and you are seeing that reward pay out big time in him starting. He's their guy right now. Will it continue? He probably won't lead the American League in ERA, but his attitude and his ability will carry him far enough to him being any reason for this team's success this year.

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One topic that may come up is the competition. Sure it hasn't been murderer's row of lineups, but he's navigated his way through some difficult opponents. He hasn't shut the Twins out three times and the A's two. He's getting some quality wins against quality opponents.

Random Details...

On top of Lowe's shutout being the first this season (a complete game for a starter), it's the first since 2010 for the Indians when then named Fausto Carmona tossed one. Indians staff didn't really do that all that much last season because A) Acta is always willing to go to his pen. B) Uh, the pen was actually good and you can trust them in handing a game over.

Back-to-back jacks in the fifth inning for Carlos Santana and Asdrubal Cabrera, but not before Shin-Soo Choo also hit a solo shot. It just added to the run support that Lowe did not need much of. All three of those gentlemen had two hits, and they were joined by Michael Brantley, who continues to swing a hot bat as he tripled (and stole a base!).

The Indians didn't even strikeout that much, just two on the game.

Casey Kotchman is now hitting above .200, but don't-cha-know, he's hitting .286 in May with double his RBI total. Told ya to just give him a little time. And you wanted LaPorta to botch things up?

Interestingly enough half of the hits that Lowe gave up were to a rookie, shortstop Brian Dozier. Yeah that's just different.

The only guy not on base at some point for the Twins? Their leadoff hitter, Darin Mastroianni, who didn't walk or collect a hit in this one. But how dirty is this lineup? I mean, it's gross looking. The crazy thing is the offensive lineup they field is not that much worse than what they fielded when they were a contender year-after-year. Sure they had Mauer and Morneau and some other good pieces, but this was never a team that scored a lot of runs.

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They had good pitching and excellent defense. Well those two aspects are now failing and not coming through and the whole offense thing is starting to look a little worse as it no longer has that support it used to. Maybe Bud Selig should threaten to contract them.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

One guy to not reach base for the Tribe was **Johnny Damon**, who in result of Choo being named the permanent leadoff hitter, [was dropped in the order](#), to even behind Michael Brantely.

"Choo is our leadoff guy. That's where he is going to hit," Acta said. "[Damon] is struggling right now. He's going to continue to get his at-bats, but he's not going to get them in the leadoff spot right now."

You can't argue with the move right now as Brantley is still hitting in his spot, Damon has struggled, and Choo so far has seemingly taken to the new spot. Even if, Damon's numbers have simply not been good, even enough to justify his continued playing time in that area. It's been long enough that a change needed to be made.

This feels very much temporary though. As you would expect Damon to eventually get it. Whether it's just a slump or still not having gotten himself up to speed, you would expect Damon to start to produce at some point and be able to be put back in that leadoff spot that he's done so well in for so many teams. But we will certainly have to wait and see on that idea.

As was expected, at least by myself, **Jack Hannahan** was not in the lineup. With the day game following the night game, it seems like not enough time would have elapsed to give Hannahan the [go-ahead to start](#). It stinks for Hannahan because this is his always his homecoming, but Acta wasn't ready to pencil in the third baseman back into the fold.

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They will continue to take a wait-and-see approach, especially after they get back to home base for tomorrow's two game swing. Acta did note that he improved, but again, we'll see where things are Wednesday for the game against Seattle.

This seems like an appropriate time to mention the more aggressive use of the shift this season. Manny Acta, always one for statistics and data, [has taken to using it a little more this year](#) , saying that it doesn't matter what way the hitter is batting, they'll go with what statistics suggest.

"Righties, lefties, it doesn't matter," said Acta. "That's the thing that has changed drastically in the game. In the past you would only see it against left-handed hitters. But if a left-hander hits the ball to right side of the infield 85 percent of the time and a right-hander hits it to the left side of the infield 85 percent of the time, why not do the same thing? That's where the game has really changed. Guys are thinking outside of the box a little more. The stats and the facts are there. It's a matter of you taking a chance on the 10 percent or 20 percent of the times you get burned."

The Indians are one of the more frequenters of employing the shift to their defense. Joe Maddon really started doing it a whole heck of a lot in Tampa Bay and Manny Acta has likened to the trend and has now made the Indians one of the teams that uses it the most. It certainly comes into play when you are talking about someone like Derek Lowe, who's getting almost all his outs via the groundball. The perfect placement is even more important.

[TIGER WATCH]

We can definitely see that lineup's potential when they do things like score EIGHT runs in one inning. They keep doing those sorts of things. Then they go and look dead in the water offensively. The common occurrence more than anything is their pitching and it struggled again despite picking up a 10-8 win over the White Sox.

I think the biggest story here is that Jake Peavy struggled for the first time this season. Just like the Indians, the Tigers had a three home run inning in the sixth. Copy cats.

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Nino has a blog that he creates dumb nicknames, even for players not on the Indians. Give it a visit at [The Tribe Daily](#).

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