

Home Run Derby Fails To Disappoint

Written by {ga=pup}

Monday, July 10 2006 7:00 PM -

Last night we were treated to a spectacle from two of the games emerging young sluggers that many Indians fans don't get to see that often. Cris Sykes feels the HR Derby has evolved into the best of the All Stars skills challenges, and provides a recap of what went down last night.



The All-Star break. The only 3 days of the year with no official professional sports games going on. They also happen to be some of my favorite days of the year.

The Home Run Derby makes the Slam Dunk Contest look like its bitch every year. Where else are you going to see the top 50 players in their sport, all sitting around and shooting the breeze with each other and continually be amazed by what these guys can do to a baseball. ESPN does a great job of keeping you into the contest, while also finding the time to give you a couple of seconds with the "who's who" list Major Leaguers.

This Derby did not disappoint. With the field littered with the new blood of Major Leaguers, the game was elevated last night.

Miguel Cabrera set the tone in his first Derby competition by leading off and hitting 9 home runs. Then a few Derby veterans went up and almost crashed the entire party. Lance Berkman, Troy Glaus and Miguel Tejada came up and hit a total of 7 home runs, and it looked like the festivities were starting to slow down.

Looking to get the crowd and players back into it, it was time for David Wright of the New York Mets to step up to the plate. Wright was making his first Derby appearance, but I have to imagine it will not be his last. Wright hit 16 homers and turned the crowd back on. The rest of the night was pretty electric. Once David Ortiz hit his 10, and Jermaine Dye managed 7, the spotlight turned heavily onto another of the great young players in the game, Ryan Howard.

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Howard got off to a slow start and it was looking like the semifinals would be without the youngster who has homered 52 times in his first 191 major league games. Needing 4 straight homers, after hitting only 4 with his first 9 outs seemed like a daunting task, but the big left-hander got hot. Now, needing 1 homer to advance Howard lifted a high fly ball to right center field that crawled over the wall for his 8th in the first round and sending Jermaine Dye to the showers.

For the first time, your home runs from the first round carried over into your second round total, so David Wright appeared to be a lock for the finals with a 6 homer lead before even swinging in the second round. Wright led off, and after hitting the first two balls way over the wall in center, Wright hit a wall of his own and could not manage to hit another one, leaving him at 18 and not so comfortable with Big Papi, Cabrera and Howard to follow. David Ortiz, the only hitter not making his Derby debut, crashed and burned and only managed 3 homers in the second round, the same number he hit last year while failing to advance to the finals. Miguel Cabrera needed 9 to tie Wright force Howard to hit 11 to knock him out, but Cabrera fell a few short, hitting 6 and leaving the door open for Howard. Ryan would need to hit 7 to advance and 10 to equal Wright's mark. Well, 10 is exactly what he did, hitting moon-shot after moon-shot throughout his barrage.

A gassed David Wright lead off the finals, but was only able to manage 4 dingers, and left the door for the guy who could very easily become the next home run monster in the Majors wide open. Ryan Howard only needed 5 outs to hit his 5th homer and take the title, but the way he hit his final one will be legend for a long time.

After sending multiple balls into both the Allegheny River and the Baseball Tonight studio located in right-center field, Howard topped them all with his last swing. There was a sign, deep in right center that would win a fan 500 round trip airline tickets if someone could hit, and on his final swing, Howard sent a towering fly ball in that direction. By time the ball began to come down, Howard had already flipped his bat and received some hugs from the other players. When that ball finally

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came down, it hit in the dead center of the promotion sign and one lucky fan was rewarded with the airline tickets. Those were on top of the new home Howard won another lucky fan by winning the Derby. Also, almost \$300,000 was donated, \$21,000 for each home run hit after the ninth out, with Howard forcing Century 21 to cough up about \$100,000 all by himself.

The other event on Monday is a celebrity softball game that actually provided some great moments. The first was Jimmy Kimmel going deep in the hole to take a base hit away from his girlfriend Sarah Silverman, then smacking her on the ass, forcing the ESPN crew to announce they are in fact a couple and there was nothing shady about that smack. The tables got turned in Kimmel's first at bat when he sent a fly-ball in the direction of Silverman, who made the catch, while screaming pretty loudly, one-handed and pumping her bare hand fist as she made the catch.

Of course, my favorite moment of the night involved no couples, or home runs. The best part was watching a Squeeler Hero make a complete buffoon of himself. First, Franco Harris made my Uncle Gimpy look like Bo Jackson when Harris tried to chase down a fly ball over his head. That was bad. This is worse. When it was his turn to bat, Harris, in slow-pitch softball, swung and missed. If that was embarrassing enough, what came next should cost him his man card. He bunted. Against a 75 year old Tommy John. And he was ecstatic about the result. He was soooo proud of himself, for bunting in a softball game.

Can you imagine Jim Brown bunting in a softball game? Never.