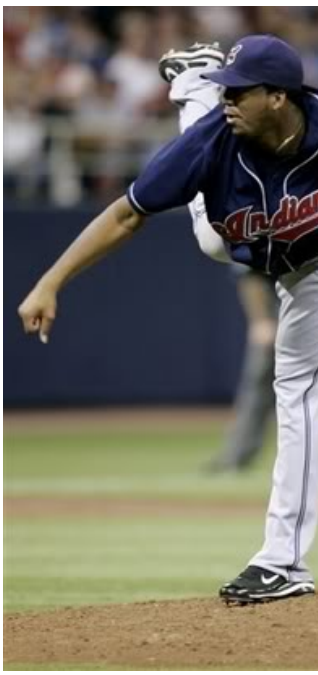
Having too much pitching is one of those great problems to have. The Indians find themselves in that dilemma presently, with Cliff Lee readying to come off the DL, and his replacement Fasuto Carmona still warranting a rotation spot. What to do when Cliffie comes back? Send him to Buffalo to keep starting? Put him in the bullpen? Paul Cousineau opines.



After Tuesday night's brilliant display by Indians hurler Fausto Carmona, the team finds themselves facing a quandary as Cliff Lee is scheduled to throw one more rehab start in Akron, and then be ready to return to his spot in the rotation.

But, with Carmona pitching as well as he is (2.63 ERA with a 1.10 WHIP in his last 2 starts), is that spot there to return to?

Carmona's mastery of the Twins as he outpitched Johan Santana (ever think you'd see those words put together?) was all the more impressive because the sinker that he throws generally induces ground balls. Since the Twins have perfected the art of pounding the ball off of the Metrodome turf, it was entirely feasible that they would dink-and-dunk their way around the bases, beating out infield hits all night.

But the Twins couldn't hit Carmona solidly and swung early and often, something they don't generally do, limiting his pitch count and accentuating his effectiveness as he moved quickly through a Twins' lineup obviously built for the old "hammer the ball into the turf and run like hell" strategy (Jason Tyner was leading off).

Carmona has now put together two consecutive outstanding starts, against the Yankees and the Twins no less, and would be 2-0 if not for the A-Rod massacre.

So, the question remains – when Lee returns from the DL, does Fausto stay in the rotation in lieu of another starter, does he transition to the bullpen, or does he return to Buffalo to stay on his five-day pitching schedule and remain the "6 th starter" in case of another injury?

As well as he has pitched, the answer is fairly obvious – he will return to the Bison rotation and wait for his next chance. In Spring Training, a line of thinking developed that if Carmona thrived in the rotation while Byrd's 2007 start mirrored his 2006 start (which is to say, he started 2007 awfully), Carmona would take Byrd's spot in the rotation and Byrd would move to the bullpen to become the highest paid reliever in Tribe history. When Matt Miller went down and his dominance of RH batters was lost, the scenario seemed more likely as Byrd's 2006 numbers vs. RH (.695 OPS) far outpaced that of his work against LH (.972 OPS).

While Carmona has certainly staked a claim in the rotation and made the argument to stay there, Byrd has done nothing to suggest that he should be precluded from the rotation. That's not to say that this arrangement couldn't happen at some point down the road; but right now, Byrd's exclusion from the rotation isn't happening.

Could Carmona help in the bullpen? Sure, but the bullpen has settled down nicely since the early season jitters and moving Carmona to the pen means that either Nasty Boy Mastny gets sent down, when he has done nothing to merit it, or the team attempts to get Jason Davis through waivers as he's out of options. Not to mention that a move to the bullpen for Carmona means that he'll get less frequent work and his ability to pitch 5+ innings will be compromised as the season progresses and his arm becomes more used to the routine of a reliever.

At this point, it makes more sense for the Indians to send Fausto to the Buffalo rotation to keep his arm stretched out and on a regular routine for when (not if) he's needed at some point later this season to step into the rotation. Having him as the 6th starter gives the Indians unheard-of insurance in their rotation and depth that would be the envy of most of MLB.

The explanation to Carmona would be that he's done nothing to justify a demotion, but that, by staying on a regular schedule and being only a phone call away that his day to contribute every fifth day will come.

What may get lost in all of this is that Fausto just turned 23 last December, meaning he's only six months younger than Jeremy Sowers and a little less than a year younger than hotshot phenom Atom Miller. If you get excited about the success or potential of either of those players, Carmona has to enter the discussion of top, ML-ready pitching prospects and rather prominently.

If Sowers' wild success since his promotion last year merits unbridled enthusiasm and Miller's AAA starts merit them airing on STO (which I finally saw on DVR … thank you STO), then Carmona deserves to be right in the mix of the talk of the rotation for 2007 and beyond.

Very simply, when it comes to starting pitching for today and tomorrow, nobody puts Fausto in a corner.