

The B-List: 5/29 - 5/31

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Sunday, May 31 2009 8:00 PM -

Unable to carry the momentum of the four game sweep of the Rays into the Yankees series, the Tribe dropped the first two games Friday and Saturday to the Bronx Bombers before winning Sunday's game in the bottom of the ninth inning. In the Monday edition of The B-List, Buff talks about just how good Carl Pavano has been, how bad Fausto Carmona has been, and also the recent wave of injuries that has hit hey regulars of this Indians team as they attempt to get back in the race in a very weak AL Central division.

FINAL

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Indians (21-29)

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W: Pettitte (5-1)

L: C. Lee (2-6)

S: Rivera (10)

FINAL

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Indians (21-30)

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W: Sabathia (5-3) L: Carmona (2-5)

FINAL

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Jackanapes (29-21)

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Indians (22-30)

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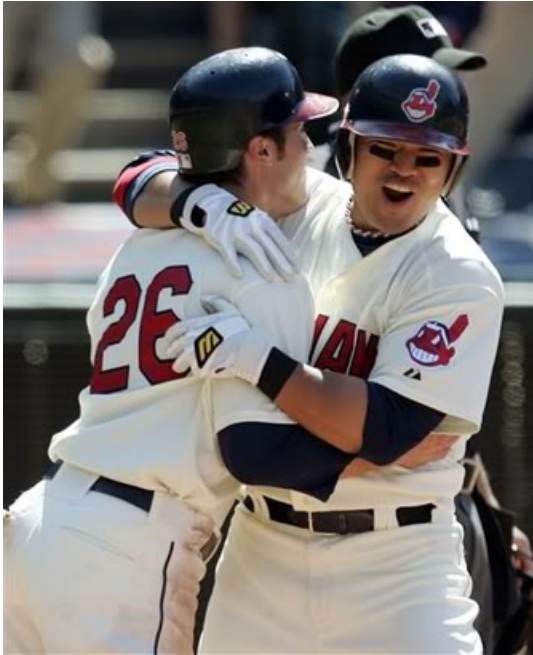
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W: K. Wood (2-2)

L: Coke (1-3)



I am expecting to get injured just writing about this team.

1) Bookends

On Friday, we got a start from one of our two good starters, and although he put up a Quality Start, giving up only three runs, he did not get the win because the offense was not up to the task of supporting him.

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Of course, Carl Pavano did get enough support that he left the game with the lead, and the team did score enough runs to win the game. Cliff Lee had no such luck, as the Indians were better at loading the bases than they were actually scoring runs with the bases loaded and he lost his 6th decision on the season. Lee has obviously pitched better than his 2-6 record would indicate, but he wasn't very sharp Friday, giving up 9 hits and 2 walks en route to an early-for-him exit after six innings.

Pavano, in contrast, was very sharp through 5 innings, and pretty sharp through 7 complete except for one nice piece of hitting by a hitter who is, in fact, awfully good.

Consider the last six starts by Lee and Pavano: in these six starts, Lee has allowed 12 runs in 42 innings, striking out 30 and walking 7 while allowing 50 hits. Pavano has allowed 16 runs in 37 2/3 innings, striking out 31 while walking 8 and allowing 39 hits.

In terms of relevant statistics:

ERA: Lee is better, 2.57 to 3.82
H/IP: Pavano, 1.035 to 1.19
BB/IP: Lee, 0.17 to 0.212
WHIP: Pavano, 1.248 to 1.357
Quality Starts: Lee, 6 to 4
K rate: Pavano, 7.41 to 6.43 (K/9)

I was all prepared to say that Pavano had pitched as well as Lee recently, but that's not really true. A full run-and-a-quarter per game is significant. And Lee hasn't given up more than 3 runs a game nor pitched fewer than 6 complete innings, while Pavano has a 4-run clunker and a 5-inning bailout on record in the past six starts.

Still, it's interesting to see that Pavano is both less hittable and sports better strikeout stuff: the major beef against Pavano as a True FOR Pitcher in 2005 when he signed his big deal was that he didn't miss enough bats.

Even in his big 2004, he only sported a 5.63 K/9 rate, which was pretty consistent with his hovering-around-6.00 rated from previous season.

And his rate completely cratered in New York into the threes, although obviously we're talking about a pitcher with a litany of injuries during this time frame.

But not only is Pavano flashing more Ks, he's still limiting the free passes, so his K:BB ratio is an excellent 3.85. It isn't quite Lee's otherworldly 5.00 from last season, but it is better than the 2009 version of Lee, at 6.57 K/9 and 3.38 K:BB on the season.

The difference, of course, is that this was Lee's worst start in his past nine games, while this was arguably Pavano's second-*best* in his past eight. And Lee allowed only one extra-base hit, a double, while Pavano gave up a double AND a two-run shot to Mark Teixeira.

Part of Lee's charm is that he may give up some hits, but tends to be good at limiting their damage: Pavano is more likely to have a clean inning, but more likely to flat-out give up a run, which is of course the more important stat.

You want weird, though? Lee, a left-handed pitcher, naturally does better against left-handed hitters than right-handers: lefties hit .253 (.601 OPS) off him, while righties fare significantly better at .315 (.767 OPS). Pavano, a right-handed pitcher ... has the same issue. He holds lefties to a .263 AVG (.712 OPS), while righties hit him hard (.327 AVG, .827 OPS).

I mean ... that's kinda strange.

Anyway, the Indians can't do any better than to trot out Cliff Lee ... but they can't reasonably be expected to do much better than trotting Carl Pavano out there instead.

2) On the other hand

They can do a lot better than trotting Fausto Carmona out there. They don't, mind you, but it isn't unreasonable to expect that they *could*

.

Here: on May 9th, Fausto Carmona went 6 2/3 innings and only gave up 2 runs. Sure, he walked 6 guys, but 2 runs is 2 runs.

On April 29 before that, he had the same basic line: 6 2/3 IP, 2 R, 4 BB.

That's just fine.

They are the only starts this season in which he has not given up at least 4 earned runs (and has given up 5 unearned runs as well).

Saturday's start marked the EIGHTH TIME in ELEVEN STARTS that Carmona has walked at least three hitters. Oddly enough, he has more starts without giving up more than a hit an inning than he has in which he's done so. But the combination of walks and hits (and notably hits after walks) is just killing him, me, and everyone else.

A 1.74 WHIP is simply atrocious.

Of all pitchers in the majors with at least 40 innings, Carmona ranks 7th

-worst in WHIP: change the threshold to 50 innings, and he is the very worst on the planet.

Worse than Sidney Ponson.

Worse than Shane Loux.

Worse than Chan Ho Park, Jon Garland, or Jamie Moyer in his sixth "Moyer is clearly finished, now, this time, for sure, you betcha" season.

Even worse than Anthony Reyes, which is kind of another issue.

The problem, of course, is that the Cleveland "rotation" is very much in the spirit of Gertrude Stein's Oakland: anyone who could reasonably be expected to replace Carmona in the rotation, should they decide to send him down Raffy Perez Style, is already here (Sowers, Huff) or hurt (Laffey, Scott Lewis, Reyes) or Chuck Lofgren (Chuck Lofgren). Sure, we could give the ol' Tomo Ohka Experience a trial run, but then, we could chop off our collective feet with axes, too, and I'm gonna go out on a limb and suggest that this wouldn't be my favorite strategy.

Anyway, Carmona was bad and we lost. He still has a better record than Cliff Lee.

3) Ow! Stop it! Ow!

Grady Sizemore's elbow finally reached a point where two weeks of rest was necessary to give it a chance of being good enough for him to play regularly, so he went on the DL.

Raffy Betancourt's groin has been bothering him (hey, nice reporting, PD/MLB.com, I certainly knew nothing about it!) for a while and finally went SPROING! and now he is on the DL.

Victor Martinez hit a ball so hard off his knee that it hurt MY knee a thousand miles away. He will not go to the DL because he is Victor Martinez, but it did necessitate calling up Chris Gimenez from the minors because he can catch, a skill Ryan Garko has forgotten in its entirety.

Travis Hafner has had a setback in his rehab. His back hurts and his shoulder is still sore. He will come off the DL anyway because, Lord knows, we don't have anyone else who can grimace while grounding out to second base.

(This is not fair: Hafner was hitting well in April and it was a welcome contribution, but the fact is, a Hafner hitting without shoulder pain is an asset, and a Hafner hitting with shoulder pain/weakness is, as demonstrated by 2008,

not
.)

Eric Wedge is day-to-day with uncontrollable eye-twitching.

4) Mammalian DNA detected, or The Fairness Doctrine

I would think that regular readers of this column would understand that many of my pronouncements about players are borne of frustration and are meant to capture what a friend of mine once called "The Zeitgeist of the Times." Since this means, "the spirit of the times of the times," this proves that my friend was not very good at German, but the point is, part of the purpose of this column is to capture the "feeling right now" of an Indians fan, and as such, it tries to strike a balance between the logical (a week's worth of

hitting is a small, insignificant sample) and the emotional or visceral ("That bastard has struck out twelve times this week!").

So, as such, it would seem that my pronouncement of Ben Francisco as a fungus is far on the right ride of the ledger, being a lot more emotional than logical, or, in fact, true.

Pressed into semi-regular duty in center field with Sizemore hurting, and elevated to the 2 slot as well, Francisco responded with a 2-for-3 day with 2 walks on Sunday. This simply continued an excellent weekend, as he had two hits and a walk on Friday as one of the few players to show up offensively for Lee, and chipped in a hit and an RBI on Saturday as well.

Francisco finished May with a lovely .295/.362/.484 line, a much better SLG than I expect from Francisco, and is now hitting .275/.351/.458 on the season with 11 doubles and 5 homers.

In addition, he has stolen 9 bases and only been caught once, something that has totally escaped my notice.

Now, and .809 OPS is still kind of marginal for a corner outfielder, and his defense can still be on the adventurous side, but a guy who can play all three OF positions with an .800+ OPS and a .350+ OBP has value to a major-league team. I'm not sure this is really good enough to be an everyday corner outfielder (Shin-Soo Choo, for example, is hitting .296/.412/.475 with 6 SB and 0 CS, which is a bit better), but it's certainly far removed from a worthless drain on the team as the term "fungus" would have you believe.

Nice job, Ben.

5) You know who else reached base in each game?

Mark DeRosa!

I have to assume that Brian Cashman has seen this heady, consistent performer in action. He is hitting .291/.359/.437 in May.

It would be a shame if he waited too long to pull the trigger.

Well, a shame for the Yankees, I mean.

Indians fans can simply enjoy the constant professionalism that is Mark DeRosa for as long as he is on the roster.

6) The Tomo Ohka Experience!

You are lucky people, because you have been able to witness the entire Tomo Ohka career in one five-inning appearance.

Tomo Ohka is pretty good: he induced 3 groundouts in a perfect 5th, including throwing strikes (10 in 15 pitches), but not missing any bats (3 fouls, no swings and misses)

Tomo Ohka gets nickle-and-dimed: after a leadoff walk, Ohka went 3-2 to Derek Jeter and gave up a single. The run scored on a groundout, and he escaped further trouble.

Tomo Ohka can eat bulk innings: one hit in the 7th, and none in the 8th, including 9-strikes-in-9-pitches stretch that struck out the first two hitters (one swinging!).

Tomo Ohka gets overexposed: and then, a double, single, and double later, and Ohka has given up 3 runs in 5 innings, a ringer for last year's 4.83 ERA he had with Milwaukee. Oh, wait, that wasn't last year, that was 2006.

He was not in the majors in 2008.

Or 2007.

My advice is to not run out and buy the #16 jersey.

7) Raffy Returns

The 3-1 loss on Friday was not very enjoyable, but there was a glimmer of good fortune to come from it: Raffy Perez looked like a major-league pitcher.

In a perfect 9th inning, Perez dispatched three hitters in 11 pitches, 8 of them strikes. Two of the outs came on ground balls, a sign that his slider was working.

Granted, he did not retire Johnny Damon on Sunday and was charged with a run after yielding a double and the mound in rapid succession, but man, it sure would be good to have Raffy Perez back.

8) Ducks on the pond!

Okay, so you're going to try to tell me that hitting 0-for-7 with runners in scoring position and loading the bases twice and scoring a total of one run, or hitting into a double play with runners on 1st and 2nd and one out are bad things, right?

Yeah, I'll probably buy that.

9) Jholtin' Jhonny

Jhonny Peralta has 10 extra-base hits on the season, 9 of them doubles. For a guy who once had plus pop at short, this is rather discouraging and puts him in the Tyner Zone for the season, with an OBP of .340 outstripping his weak slugging of .329.

Sure, he got off to an embarrassing start at .211/.294/.276 in April, but even in May, he hit .297/.379/.374.

Two ninety seven is very good.

Three seventy nine is excellent.

Being in the Tyner Zone is crappy.

Still, Peralta provided three of the Tribe's nine hits on Sunday and drove in three of their runs, including the only runs driven in on hits (the other two were sac flies). And, it should be said, his game-winning "single" past Alex Rodriguez down the line would probably have been a double had it not simply ended the game.

So ... nice work, Jhonny ... but geez ... mix in some Wheaties or something.