Reduced to spoilers once again this season, it sure was nice to get another series win over the Twins this weekend. The Tribe has now taken four of six from the division rival Twinkies over the last two weeks to help prevent Minnesota from getting back in the AL Central race. In the Monday edition of The B-List, Buff examines the recent performances of Justin Masterson and Aaron Laffey, talks about the enigma that is Jhonny Peralta, and recaps the weekend set with the Twins.

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W: S. Baker (10-7) L: Masterson (3-4)

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W: Laffey (7-3) L: Blackburn (8-8)

I'm gonna make a bold pronouncement here and suggest that the Minnesota Twins are not really a very good baseball team.

1) Adventures in commanderbussery, I

It would be simplistic to say that Justin Masterson' contol problems were a result of him being "stretched out" from a reliever to a starter: true, he has gone from being a 20-pitch pitcher for the Red Sox to go 46, 61, and 83 pitches in his three Cleveland outings, and yes, he did walk the final two batters he faced, but it's not like Masterson's command was exceptional and faded. He walked at least one batter in each of the four innings in which he pitched, and one of the walks he allowed in the 4th (to Denard Span) was an 8-pitch monster involving three foul balls (including two with two strikes).

Masterson hadn't allowed more than one walk in any of his previous 9 appearances, although two of those appearances were one-out affairs, so this is no mean feat.

Still, with 27 walks in 79 innings coming into the game, it's not like Masterson has been some sort of Greg Aquino water sprinkler or anything.

Of course, it could be that recovering from a 61-pitch start and getting into the groove of starting every fifth day requires some adjustment. It could also be that the Twins simply got on his case right out of the box: Span's first walk was the same kind of 8-pitch affair, and Orly Cabrera followed this with a 9-pitch groundout that featured 4 foul balls of his own.

After that, Masterson faced the three main power bats in the Minnesota lineup (Mauer, Morneau, Kubel), each of whom is having an outstanding season with real home run power, and with Masterson's historic troubles with left-handed hitting of any sort, much less superior, it probably made some good bit of sense to tread carefully through those waters.

Still, each of the first five batters saw Ball Three (two walked), so by the time Masterson was starting on the Soft Underbelly portion of the Twins' lineup, he had already thrown 33 pitches in 5 batters. To his credit, he sawed through these batters with little effort, but by the time he spun back to the top (where Span, another lefty, constitutes the Twins' remaining plus bat), he gave up runs in earnest and was gone by the early 4th inning.

Trying to mold these data into a real, meaningful statement is simply impossible: giving up hits to Joe Mauer does not constitute any fundamental failure on ANY pitcher's part, and the gauntlet of Span, Cabrera, Mauer, Morneau, and Kubel hits .298, .283, .375 (!), .300, and .312.

Against right-handed pitchers, the numbers for the 3-4-5 hitters balloon to .421, .289, and .346 (did you know that Justin Morneau hits lefties better than righties this season?

I didn't ... but I did know that Kubel MURDERS righties, with a 1.050 OPS).

And for a pitcher with an oddball delivery like Masterson, these differences are likely even more pronounced.

Quick aside: Joe Mauer hits .421/.488/.715 against right-handed pitching for a 1.203 OPS. I mean, that's nearly absurd.

In any event, the optimistic way to look at this is that Masterson battles against tough hitters and doesn't give in, even in hitter's counts. Not one Twin got an extra-base hit, and he induced a pair of inning-ending double plays. The pessimistic way to look at it is that walking 5 guys, throwing a wild pitch, and holding runners poorly enough to yield a pair of stolen bases in only 3 1/3 innings of work shows a lack of command that is almost Daniel Cabrera in nature.

Frankly, I don't think either explanation is wholly accurate, although I'd learn more to the optimistic than the pessimistic. This is the first outing in which Masterson got truly walk-happy, and the Twins deserve some of the credit for making him work so hard.

On the other hand, giving up 6 hits and 5 walks in 3 1/3 innings is plainly awful.

In the grand scheme of things, there's no reason to change any plans here, except to be less shitty.

2) Adventures in commanderbussery, II

See, on the other hand, Aaron Laffey really *does* have to change.

On the surface, Laffey continued his good work, going 5 1/3 innings to get his 7th win of the season. He fell two outs short of a Quality Start, only giving up 3 runs, all in a 3-run flurry in the 2nd in which he somehow gave up a homer to Delmon Young, who is slugging .369 on the season.

The confound here, of course, is that Young slugs .495 against left-handed pitching (and hits .297, although he has walked negative three times), so it behooves one to be careful as a lefty to Delmon Young, who has otherwise been a massive disappointment for the Twins.

But with 4 more walks in those 5 1/3 innings, Laffey continued a disturbing stretch in which he's walked at least two batters a game in 6 of the seven starts he's made since returning to the majors. It's the third start in which he's walked more than he's struck out, and in a 4th start he walked and struck out the same number.

And although I like the fact that he's become more confident in his four-seam fastball, another weapon in the arsenal to use, perhaps it should be used more sparingly, as another "backward" 6:8 GO:FO ratio resulted.

Staked to a lead in the top of the third, Laffey settled in a largely held the Twins in check, inducing a pair of double play bounceouts and holding Minnesota scoreless for the rest of his time on the mound, but the walks are just troubling: although none of the batters Laffey walked came around to score, they contributed to Laffey's early exit with 105 pitches already being racked up a couple batters into the 6th inning. To transmogrify into that Mythical Ace we talked about, not only does Laffey have to keep scoring down (he kind of did), but he has to go deep

into most games (he pretty much didn't). And going deep into games is a lot simpler if you're not throwing a bunch of extra pitches putting guys on base without striking the ball.

3) In the interest of completeness

David Huff pitched.

Nine hits and two walks in 5 innings of work is the pitching analog of being fat, drunk, and stupid at Faber College.

I am encouraged by the fact that David Huff induced 9 (nine!) swinging strikes, nearly as many as Masterson and Laffey combined (5 each). But it's hard to express how difficult I find it to write something fresh and exciting about David Huff, whose pitching is neither.

4) Theatre of the Absurd

Adorable J. Carroll, right fielder.

Now, listen: I poke fun at Carroll for being a light-hitting utility infielder. Also for being eleven years old and part magical creature.

The fact is, Jamey Carroll has had a terrific season: not terrific in the global sense of being an MVP candidate or anything like that, but in the sense that we signed him to play a particular role on the team, and he played that role about 80% better than I thought he could AND *expanded* his role to include things I didn't think he was capable of doing.

The man is hitting .306/.396/.393 this season: this is an improvement of 30, 41, and 38 points on all of his career averages.

He's 35 years old and pretty much playing the best baseball of his career, all while playing a

weird collection of position (2B, 3B, RF) that very few other players combine for (Ryan Raburn and Casey Blake come to mind as being capable of this).

If you are a contending team with a weak bench, I defy you to find me a player that you could realistically trade for that would give you more bang for your buck. At this point, I have to believe that Mark Shapiro would trade Carroll for what amounts to salary relief, although I hear he's also partial to ribs. Ma
ybe Rogaine.

Call him, what the heck can it hurt?

Sure, he might try to talk you into Kerry Wood, but it doesn't hurt to ask.

But really, now: let's be serious. Is there anything more ridiculous than having Adorable J. Carroll playing right field on anything but an emergency basis?

I understand that Trev Crowe is hurt, but y'know, should we take this opportunity to let him ... y'know ... HEAL?

And then call up a guy who is SUPPOSED to play a corner outfield slot, like a Brantley or LaPorta or the ghost of Charlie Spikes?

Isn't this just a little bit silly?

5) Before you ask

No.

6) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.

Surely it does not help to have a lineup in which Luis Valbuena, Kelly Shoppach, Chris Gimenez, and Andy Marte combine to got 0-for-12 while seeing a TOTAL of 30 pitches (2 ½ per plate appearance), but Scott Baker pitched a truly excellent game Friday night, giving up only 2 hits and no walks (although he did hit Grady Sizemore once) to waltz through the Cleveland

lineup in only 94 pitches. I mean, that's a great game.

Thus far this season, Baker has faced the Indians three times, goin 3-0 with a 0.78 ERA (2 ER in 23 IP) and a preposterous 19:2 K:BB ratio. He is 7-7 with a 5.28 ERA against teams that are not Cleveland. If he becomes a free agent, I would suggest that he not sign with Cleveland, because then he would face exclusively non-Cleveland opposition.

7) Wait, wasn't Gimenez in right ...

I said, "NO!"

8) Two bright spots

The two players to get hits against Baker were the two Indians to have hits in all three games: Asdrubal Cabrera (4-for-14 with two doubles) and Jhonny Peralta (5-for-12 with a double).

Peralta has hit well since the All-Star Break, hitting .313/.349/.464 and showing a bit of power. Well, actually, he showed power in July: in August, he is slugging an anemic .380.

I have largely given up trying to understand Jhonny Peralta.

One weird split jumps out, though:

Home: .245/.314/.310
Away: .298/.356/.488

I mean ... does anyone who doesn't play in Petco or Safeco have a split like that? That's just strange. You think a guy who hits .298/.356/.488 might be valuable?

Heck, that's a legitimate third-base bat.

I learned the danger of over-reading home/road splits from Josh Barfield, but ... that's a good bat.

The other bat ... um ... not so much.

(By the way, Cabrera's road OPS is 103 points higher than his home OPS, too. Which is ... it's *weird*
, dammit.

Not Jacobs Field isn't THAT much of a pitcher's park.

C'mon.)

9) Team smash!

The Indians pounded three homers off poor Nick Blackburn, including back-to-back jobs by Shoppach and Valbuena before a pause for a hit batsman (Marte) and then a third homer (by Sizemore).

I am going to go out on a limb here and claim this says more about Blackburn than it does about the Indians' latent power.

It bears noting that two more homers were hit off Tony Sleestak on Saturday (Shin-Soo Choo and Sizemore), but ... guys, it's Tony Sleestak.

10) Disconnect

Jess Todd really throws good stuff. I mean, he throws very hard (95+ mph) and has some movement.

But great googly moogly, he doesn't actually get guys OUT with it. In 4 appearances for the Tribe, he has one scoreless outing; his only Cardinals appearance featured runs given up as well.

I like Todd and think he will be a valuable member of the 2010 bullpen ... but facts is facts, so to speak: at some point, Jess Todd has to actually PITCH WELL to be considered a guy who can PITCH WELL. Pitch well!

11) High Art

Saturday:

R. Perez: 1 1/3 IP, 1 H, 0 BB, 1 K 0 R
Smiff: 1 2/3 IP, 0 H, 0 BB, 1 K, 0 R
Sipp: 1 IP, 1 H (HR), 0 BB, 0 K, 1 R

Sunday:

Smiff: 1 IP, 1 H, 0 BB, 1 K, 0 R
Sipp: 1 1/3 IP, 1 H, 1 BB, 1 K, 0 R
C. Perez: 1/3 IP, 0 H, 0 BB, 0 K, 0 R
Wood: 1 IP, 1 H, 1 BB, 3 K, 1 R

I mean, that's good stuff. It is noteworthy that both Smiff and Sipp went back-to-back days with no real ill effect. And any clean outing from Raffy Perez deserves a huzzah or two.

12) The fly in the ointment, or Curmudgeon Corner

I do not begrudge Kerry Wood an opportunity to pitch. He's not a bad guy, although he certainly hasn't actually performed well this season.

But the Tribe is bending over backwards to let him finish games, which will trigger the option year in his contract. And although this is an ethical thing to do, I still hate it.

Look, you have to act in good faith or negotiating future contracts with incentive clauses will be prohibitively difficult. They put the clause in there to protect themselves from injury more than anything else. But Wood's option is so expensive, and Wood has pitched so poorly, and the team is so hamstrung by the Big Three Contracts of Wood, Hafner, and Westbrook ... it just makes me cringe to see the team actively TRYING to make his "games finished" clause roll over. I know it's the Right Thing To Do.

I feel bad for complaining about it.

I still hate it.