The Indians take the first series of the year from the Chicago Evil Sox with a scrappy 11-inning win in the non-getaway game (seriously, why wasn't this a day game?). Today's B-List outlines an encouraging performance by Justin Masterson (with a suitable warning), the continued clitch hitting, and wonders if Tony Sipp has considered a change in approach that would involve keeping his eyes open when he pitches. Also, if anyone lives in Chicago, please send Ozzie Guillen a fruit basket (details in the article) …

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W: J. Lewis (1-0)□□□□□□□□□□□□ L: Putz (0-1)□□□□□ S: C. Perez (2)

I normally try to write something amusing here, but I can't think of anything funnier than "DH Juan Pierre."

1) Passing the Practice Test

Justin Masterson has a lot of things going for him: he's tall, so his pitches have a nice downward plane to them. He has some natural sink, so he induces a lot of ground balls. And he's very tough on right-handers, both out of the 'pen (where he's REALLY tough on them) and as a starter.

On the other hand, the same delivery that makes him so tough on right-handers leaves him vulnerable to lefties, causing some pundits to wonder if perhaps Masterson's days as a starter are numbered. There are two schools of thought here:

a) He gives up too many hits to left-handers and will eventually get pounded as a starter, also having trouble getting deep into a game
b) As a starter, the occasional smack by a left-hander will be diluted over the course of a longer outing

I'm not sure what I think, but I'd lean towards (b). That is, if you have to pitch around a tough lefty in the 7th inning of a 1-run game, you could open yourself up to a bigger inning; if you have to pitch around a tough lefty (or even give up a solo shot) early in the 2nd or 3rd, it's a lot easier to recover from.

The problem here, of course, is that the White Sox' left-handed hitters smell to high heaven.

The lineup against Masterson inexplicably featured Andruw Jones instead of Mark Kotsay. Well, I mean, it's at least partially explicable in the sense that Mark Kotsay is a schmoe, but … well, so is Andruw Jones (at this point in his career). And somehow, Ozzie Guillen has gotten it into his head that Jones is still an elite defender, so you have to put him in the field, leaving the DH slot open for …

… Juan Pierre.

Now, look, all jokes aside, this is plainly absurd.

2005: .276/.326/.354
2006: .292/.330/.388
2007: .293/.331/.353
2008: .283/.327/.328
2009: .308/.365/.392

I suppose if you think that Juan Pierre had a career renaissance at Age 31 and he is likely to replicate last year's numbers, I don't know what to tell you. Juan Pierre is bad at hitting. His OBP remains remarkably consistently .330 for four straight seasons, and even in his gork year his SLG remains below .400. He's bad.

So the three left-handed hitters in the lineup for Masterson are Pierre, A.J. Pierzynski, and Mark Teahen. Pierzynski can hit some. Teahen is good at walking. Pierre is bad.

Against these three, Justin Masterson allowed each of them to reach base: singles by Pierzynski and Pierre, and a walk to Teahen in 7 plate appearances for a .333/.429/.333 line. This line isn't trying to be significant (it's seven PA), but it is in line with the kind of thing Masterson is prone to … and these guys aren't any good. So the fact that Masterson "shut down" the Sox with 1 R on 4 H in 5 IP, striking out 5 … well … y'know, it's better than doing poorly, but I'm not going to go proclaiming Masterson some great success who's "turned the corner, woo hoo!" yet.

(Right-handers got 2 singles and 1 walk in 15 PA, while posting all 5 Ks. Good stuff.)

This having been said, Masterson did pitch well: the 1 run he allowed was on a bases-loaded walk that really bore no resemblance to an Actual Walk. (We will discuss the umpiring later: see the section entitled "*(@^$ #&$+^&*#$^ $#&*^@&^#%@!!!!! ") His K per inning is clearly a good thing from a staff whose starters do not miss a lot of bats. And although he only started 9 of the 22 hitters with a strike, he threw 58 strikes in 92 pitches and generally had good command. I am encouraged by this start, but reserve judgement on what it means more globally.

2) Shut up, sotto voce!

Grady Sizemore may have started the season slowly, but his hit in Game 2 was a big one, paving the way for the 5-3 win. Last night, Sizemore showed that he may be truly untracked now, going 3-for-6 with 3 RBI, 2 of which came with two outs. Two of the hits were for extra bases, each of which came with a man on first, and the other hit was a two-out single with Mike Brantley on second, one of only two hits the Tribe got with a runner in scoring position.

Yes, both doubles were pulled, and no, he doesn't have a walk yet, but Floyd and Putz are pretty good pitchers, and reports of Grady's demise seem premature at best. (Sizemore *has* been hitting the ball the other way some thus far, but they tend to be caught by the left fielder.)

3) Dynamic Duo, Pitching Dept.

In the pre-season series on my blog about players from whom we can reasonably expect significant improvement this year (defined as at least a 10-point increase in VORP), Raffy Perez was one of the top choices. This isn't necessarily because I expected him to have such a great performance this season, but rather because he was so unrelentingly putrid last season that even a "quality" season from him would represent a huge swing. Perez had enormous problems with both command (moving the ball in the strike zone) and control (hitting the damned strike zone at all) last season, manifesting itself as having too many walks and too many hard-hit balls.

Last night, Perez did give up a leadoff single to Pierre, which is nigh unconscionable, but after a sacrifice and an intentional walk, calmly dispatched both Paul Konerko and Andruw Jones, getting two swings-and-misses from Konerko in the process. (Actually Konerko hit the 1-2 pitch pretty well, but right to Sizemore in center.) He then got A.J. Pierzynski to start the 10th, getting him down 0-2 in the process, before giving way to a right-hander. In all, Perez threw 19 strikes in 27 pitches; 19 in 23 if the intentional walk is removed. An effective Perez would be gigantic for this bullpen.

The right-hander he yielded to was Jensen Lewis, who recorded 5 outs in an efficient 23 pitches: although he did walk a batter, he didn't give up any hits and struck out a batter, getting three swings-and-misses of his own over the course of the outing. Lewis wasn't on my list because I didn't think he was really capable of significant improvement, but he's definitely looked good in his two outings thus far.

4) Dynamic Duo, Hitting Dept.

In the same series, two of the hitters I singled out for reasonably-expected improvement were Jhonny Peralta (because he was barely replacement-level last season) and Matt LaPorta (because he would get to play a lot more). It's not always easy to project Peralta, who can be streaky and maddening, but given that he is settled in as the regular third-baseman instead of wondering if he'll stay at shortstop and that it's effectively a "contract year" (the Indians have a $7M team option for 2011), I don't think it's unwarranted to expect some improvement here.

Even Peralta's detractors will tell you that pressure situations do not seem to affect him much: he was one of the few players who consistently hit in the 2007 playoffs, and he generally has

the same Thorazine Expression no matter what the inning (month, city, consciousness state). So it wasn't altogether shocking that with two outs and a runner on first base in a 3-2 game, Peralta was able to recover from an 0-2 count against the uniformly excellent Matt Thornton to take a pretty darn good low, outside corner pitch the other way into the right-center field gap for a game-tying RBI double. Peralta had two hits and a walk in 5 PA and even stole a base earlier in the game: he now sports an unsustainable .300/.462/.500 line that is nonetheless fun to look at. He is owned in merely 13.4% of ESPN Fantasy leagues, meaning you should go pick him up now.

LaPorta is being "protected" in the 6 hole to this point, which is, truthfully, a fine idea. He's certainly taken to it, matching Peralta's line of 2-for-4 with a walk and hitting his second double of the season off Gavin Floyd. Although he neither scored nor drove in a run, LaPorta's early .364/.417/.545 line is equally fun to look at and bodes well for the rest of the season.

5) Sotto voce

Why did we sign Russ Branyan?

6) Ducks on the pond!

Once again, the few instances of clutch hitting (Peralta in the 8th, Cabrera and Sizemore in the 11th) obscure the fact that the Indians left 10 more guys on base and hit a miniscule 2-for-10 with runners in scoring position. I'm not expecting the Tribe to drive in every baserunner or score 10 runs a game, but really now: 11 hits (including 4 doubles), 4 walks, two errors, and a wild pitch really ought to score more than a half-run an inning. This will bite us eventually.

7) Putting the "blunder" in "blunderbuss"

Last season, Tony Sipp was clearly more effective than Raffy Perez. Of course, so were warm bowls of green Jell-O™, but seriously: Sipp has marvelous K stuff and can be nasty.

Sadly, when you put up 3 Witt Points in 1/3 IP (2 BB, 1 WP) and throw 5 strikes in 14 pitches, you need to work on your … *everything*.

8) Welcome to the club!

Jamey Wright pitched.

9) The Kerry Wood Obsolescence Project

Each hitter was started with a first-pitch strike.

Two of the three hitters started 0-2.

The two right-handed hitters grounded out to second, suggesting a bit of power as well as control.

Ten strikes in 14 pitches and a 1-2-3 inning for his second save.

In other news, Kerry Wood is scheduled to start throwing today. I wonder if he made this suggestion after seeing the last two games.

10) Smallball for Fun and Profit

Here's the thing about "smallball:" it has its moments. When used judiciously, it can have an

enormous benefit. Take the 11th inning, for example: after a leadoff bunt single by Luis Valbuena (who noticed Mark Teahen giving him the infield there), Tofu Lou Marson dropped down a nice sacrifice to put a runner in scoring position. That meant that when Asdrubal Cabrera hit his two-out single to short right, it was enough to score the go-ahead run. In the 11th inning, that's enormous. (Of course, Grady Sizemore rendered this moot with a follow-up double, but that's impossible to project from the 8 slot.)

On the other hand, when used to remove the bat from one of your best hitters, this is not very advisable. Gordon Beckham may be a young player, but he is already one of the White Sox' better offensive players, and in a lineup that has so many offensive sinks, you really need Beckham to hit as often and as well as possible.

Never mind the advisability of putting Juan Pierre in the leadoff slot (Advisability Factor: 0.02). Having Beckham sacrifice him over to second not once but TWICE is just self-loathing. Yes, the second time was in the 9th inning of a tie game: that one I can defend. But the previous one was in the 7th inning, and you have to ask yourself: you have Carlos Quentin and Paul Konerko following Beckham, two guys as likely to hit for extra bases as not. And Beckham isn't much of a threat to ground into a double play. Further, ostensibly you had Pierre lead off because he's fast and could outright steal second. I suppose that either case was defensible, but you have to take into account the hitter you're sacrificing as well, and Ozzie Guillen either did not or thinks less of Gord Beckham than I do.

See, here's the thing: do you sacrifice Lou Marson for a better chance of scoring a run (in the late innings)? Yes, you do. You know why? BECAUSE HE'S LOU MARSON! Would you have had Grady Sizemore bunt there? Beckham hit .270/.347/.460 last season. That's essentially Grady Sizemore.

(I wouldn't have done that.)

11) This having been said

Three sacrifices is a lot of sacrifices. Don't get carried away, Manny.

12) Managerial Head-Scratchers

I touched on this topic on the blogspot blog, but the current 2 through 6 hitters have a bunched L-L-L-R-R set right now. This isn't a big deal at the beginning of the game, but in the late innings, this can really set up the opposing manager with some very easy reliever matchups, giving him some significant platoon advantages for very little cost. Consider that Guillen was able to start Matt Thornton at the beginning of the 8th with Sizemore, Choo, and Hafner due up. Later, Putz could be called in to face Peralta and LaPorta back-to-back. It's hard to make a real constructive suggestion at this point, given that LaPorta is still quite green and Peralta is still quite Peralta, but still: at some point, I expect this situation to get addressed differently. (Lord knows what will happen when Russ Branyan, another lefty, is added to the mix.)

13) Thumper Rule

Let me say this about Joe Smiff: