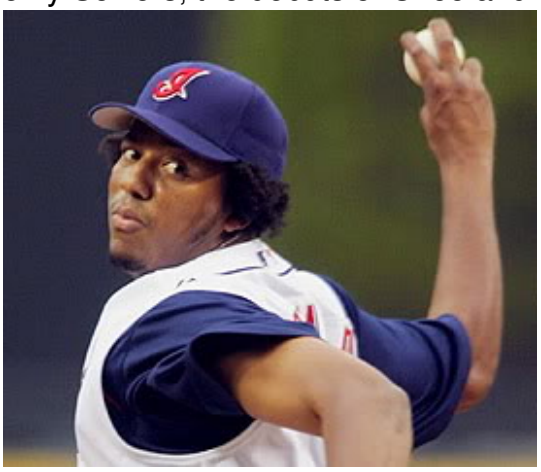
The Indians got Faustoed last night as the teams new closer came in and self imploded, turning a 3-3 game into a 7-3 Mariners win. In the Monday edition of The B-List, Buff hits on that as well as Jeremy Sowers, the debuts of Choo and Marte, and the rest of the weekend set with the Mariners.



Just one pitcher short of an entire weekend of 1968 pitchers' duels.

1) Paradigm Shift or Small Sample Size Theater

It is hard to say that Jeremy Sowers should have pitched better than he did Friday night. (It would also be both greedy and significantly dumb.) In pitching his second straight complete-game shutout (technically redundant, but used for emphasis), Sowers kept the Mariners off-balance with an array of fastballs, sliders, changeups, smoke, mirrors, hypnosis, retinal laser pointers, bribes, and vicious taunting to finish a one-walk 5-hitter. He went to as many as three balls on a hitter exactly once, to the one guy who walked (Weird Harold Sexson). He finished up at 109 pitches, induced a double play, and was generally very, very good. Sowers is the first Indians rookie to pitch consecutive shutouts since the immortal Dick Todrow: hopefully, Sowers will be spared Tidrow's fate of being traded to the Yankees and converted to a relief pitcher forced to toil in Wrigley. (Actually, it would be sparing ME the fate of being traded to the Yankees: that worked out pretty well for Dick.)

One obvious thing about pitching a shutout is that Sowers kept the ball in the yard: since giving up the home run was Sowers' major bugaboo in his short time in the majors, this is very good indeed. I think this shows that Sowers can be an effective major-league pitcher (I don't think he has the stuff for an Ace, but the Glavine/Tudor thing would be perfectly ... tremendous, frankly) as long as he can keep the ball out of the sweet spot. Glancing up and down the Seattle lineup, there aren't that many sweet spots (Sexson, and ... Sexson? Maybe Eduardo Perez?), but back-to-back shutouts is hard to chalk up to total flukitude. The question as to whether Sowers has made some fundamental adjustment to the bigs or has simply stayed upright on the tightrope twice in a row is open, but the former looks awfully enticing right now.

I do have a nit to pick, though: the rest of this season is about development. Winning is nice, but we're not going to make the playoffs: it's debatable whether .500 is even an attainable goal. We need to play the yoots and develop the skills that are going to put us in a position to win in 2007. To this end, we want to maximize the exposure of guys like Marte and Choo and Sowers and minimize the Aaron Boones and Gil Motas (Moti?) of the world. What would be the point,

except to showcase (and, I'd argue, showcasing these two only diminishes their trade value: as Mark Twain did not say, "Better to induce others to believe in the value of your experienced veteran than to use him, have him fail, and remove all doubt.")?

To this end, Fausto Carmona has been appointed our titular closer. He has great stuff, and is an effective reliever: the question is, does he have the makeup and intestinal fortitude to be a Shiny New Closer? Well, we have to find out, right? That's going to determine whether we need to groom someone else (and please, quoth me not Jason Davis) or troll for one in the off-season. We need to get his feet wet, give him some shots, see what he's got. What better opportunity is there than against a relatively weak-hitting club in a one-run game, being able to start the inning, against guys who've been baffled by a annoying left-hander all night? This is challenging enough (a 1-run nail-biter) to count as a real test, but low-key enough (weak hitters, off balance, want to go home) that it's not tossing him into a fire weaking a kerosene-soaked jumpsuit. I know it's nice to win, and it's certainly nice to know that Sowers can be Dick Tidrow in a pinch, but which is more important to the development of the 2007 Indians? Isn't this an obvious spot for Carmona (at the beginning, not the faux crisis of two outs facing Sexson with a man on)?

2) Not kerosene, but naphtha

That answer would be a resounding, "No."

Wow, could Carmona have been any more worthless than he was Sunday? Walking the leadoff guy on four pitches, hitting a batter to load the bases, giving up four runs with two outs, not even making it through the inning ... I'm not saying this would definitely have been the result Friday (and I'd still have argued, and continue to argue, for his use there), but it was just about the worst meltdown we've had since ... the last one, I guess. He certainly has learned a thing or two from Really Big Bob.

3) Twin lessons in Squanderball

Jake Westbrook ptiched pretty well on Saturday: 6 hits and 2 walks in 8 full for a WHIP of 1.00. He only struck out 3, but he is Jake Westbrook. He gave up a homer and a strange-looking 11:10 GB:FB ratio (Westbrook is normally over 3.00), but 2 runs in 8 innings ought to be enough.

Cliff Lee pitched pretty well on Sunday: 7 hits and 1 walk in 7 2/3 for a WHIP of 1.04. He gave up a homer and a 3:18 GB:FB ratio, but he is Cliff Lee. He only struck out two (Lee's recent outings had been suggesting an approach to a K and inning rate), but 3 runs in 7 2/3 ought to be enough.

In each case, the followup act was not entirely helpful (Sikorski gave up a solo shot, although extended his outing-with-strikeout streak, Carmona turned into a newt and did not get better), but the real culprit(s) was the inept Cleveland offense, which supported Lee with 3 runs and Westbrook with but 1. Of course, since it proved empirically that 1 was enough (for Sowers), I can see their befuddlement.

4) Welcome to the club!

Shin-Soo Choo had a fairly nice debut as a Cleveland Indian.

Wait, what am I talking about? Choo had a FANTABULOUS debut as an Indian, waiting out two walks and hitting a 400-plus-foot blast to provide the game's only run. Although he only managed one more walk in his other four weekend plate appearances, his Friday performance was a pretty nice introduction to Mr. Choo.

Tom Mastny, on the other hand, was brilliant!

Okay, I exaggerated. So I'm biased. He threw two pitches and got a guy out. Ask Fausto if that's impressive, though.

5) Great moments in lineup construction

What makes a managerial decision truly Great? Two things must happen:

a) It must work
b) It must have been something I agreed with or suggested

Moving Joe Inglett up into the two hole against Fearsome Felix Hernandez is just such a move: not only did Inglett supply two of the four hits yielded by Hernandez, but I asked why our worst offensive performer was in the 2 slot instead of the best available. Since it was My Idea, naturally, I find it quite brilliant indeed.

6) Waiter, this underbelly is soft!

Travis Hafner broke out of a 0-for-19 slump with ... an infield single. I will pause for a moment as you try to fix the image of Travis Hafner hitting an infield single in your mind.

This means that for the weekend, the vaunted 3-4-5 combo of Hafner (started the weekend hitting .300), Martinez (.312), and Blake (.302) went 5-for-34 with one run scored and two driven in (on groundouts). This is the heart of the order. Grady Sizemore reached base 5 times, Inglett and Michaels in the two slot 5 more, and scored exactly two runs because Travis Hafner is especially good at grounding out to second.

That's not the heart of the order, that's like the lower intestine of the order. Possibly the bladder of the order.

7) Adventures in third basing

Andy Marte's callup was not exactly great. In addition to a whiff and an inning-ending GIDP, he made an error in the field. He did have a nice play in the ninth, but that's crummy.

Of course, the 0-for-2 the next night wasn't a lot better.

Of course, Aaron Boone's 0-for-3 the next day wasn't a significant improvement, either.

For those keeping score, that's 0-for-8 with one K, 1 error, 1 GIDP, and two pinch-hitting appearances by Todd Hollandsworth. Although Hollandsworth got an intentional pass and a pointless single, this is not the point. The fact that your third baseman must be pinch-hit for by Todd Hollandsworth is indicative of a deeper problem: namely, that they are sucking.

8) Farewell the Tongue

Ron Belliard, known affectionately as "The Tongue" for his propensity to thrust his tongue outward pretty much all the time, has been traded to St. Louis. Belliard's final performance was a nice 2-hit game on Sunday. I was skeptical of signing Belliard from Colorado (I lobbied for Todd Walker, an execrable defensive player but one that can hit), but Belliard has been a valuable player for the Indians and it's hard not to wish him the best (especially since he's in the NL now).

Belliard is replaced by ex-Tribe farmhand Hector Luna, who is exactly the same player, except with a tongue that still fits inside his mouth, and more defensively versatile. I'm missing the downside here, unless Luna takes bats away from Inglett, about whom I am now totally irrational.

9) Box Score Follies

In the bottom of the ninth with men on first and second and no outs, Joe Inglett hit a ground ball that is described in ESPN's play-by-play as "a fielder's choice to left." Can someone explain this to me? How slow do you have to be to ground out to LEFT? And Inglett is pretty fast! Anyway, getting Belliard thrown out as a force play on a ball hit out of the infield qualifies as "weird."