There are games that feel magical right from the onset, games that transcend the time of year or the teams involved. It is possible for a classic game to involve two teams that aren't legitimate playoff contenders, and it is possible for a game in the early part of the season to take on a special significance, either through an extraordinary individual performance, or a team effort to extend a tight game. This … this was not one of those games.

FINAL

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4

5

6

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9

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White Sox (19-25)

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1

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14

2

Indians (16-27)

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2

7

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W: Danks (4-3) L: Masterson (0-∞)

Guy walks into a bar and orders a “Justin Masterson.” Bartender begins flinging alcoholic drinks in all directions. Guy’s cigarette sets entire bar on fire. Everyone goes home unhappy. (rimshot)

1) A Relentless March of Bad™

My favorite stat from Justin Masterson’s fifth loss of the season: *

My second-favorite stat from Justin Masterson’s fifth loss of the season comes from Paul Hoynes’ writeup of the game:

Lefties, who came into the game hitting .360 (32-for-83), went 4-for-5 in the first. In his four innings of work, Chicago's lefties went 7-for-12.

So yeah, that’s pretty flaming awesome. Of course, Masterson also gave up two hits to right-handers, walked two guys, struck out NO ONE WHATSOEVER, and generated a piss-poor FOUR swinging strikes. I mean, it’s one thing to have an exploitable weakness, but if this is not offset by some sort of strength, well then … that’s just weak, yeah?

To this point, Masterson might have been infuriating and inconsistent, but the one thing he COULD do is strike guys out (especially right-handers):

4/8: 5 IP, 5 K
4/14: 6 IP, 9 K
4/20: 4 IP, 6 K
4/25: 4 IP, 4 K
5/1: 7 2/3 IP, 7 K
5/8: 6 IP, 8 K

The only time he didn't strike out at least a batter an inning was a game in which he went deep into the game, and 7 Ks is still quite good. This results in a K/9 rate of 10.745, which is clearly terrific. However, in his last three starts:

5/14: 5 1/3 IP, 4 K
5/19: 5 IP, 3 K
5/24: 4 IP, 0 K

Now, whether this is a product of "aiming" the ball or lacking confidence in his stuff or losing his release point or breaking in a new set of cleats, I can't tell you, but this translates into a 4.395 K/9 rate that is … David Huff.

Three starts, sample size, development path, plonk. Don't care. Hate watching it. Oh, did I mention the three wild pitches, including one that allowed a run to score? Woot! There it isn't!

* This space intentionally left blank

2) Feast or Famine

Jason Donald had an auspicious debut in Tampa, proving himself to be up to the task of hitting major-league pitching with a pair of hits and a walk in 4 trips to the plate.

Yesterday, Donald collected his first extra-base hit on the season, which quickly turned into his

first TWO extra-base hits as a pair of doubles. He also walked twice to reach all 4 times he came to the plate.

In every other game but these, Jason Donald has reached base once (on a single) in 19 plate appearances.

So … um … yeah.

3) Hunger or Famine

Three Chicago hitters came into the game with a sub-.300 OBP (four if you count the pinch-runner Alexei Earmirez, who did get a plate appearance and walked), including their DESIGNATED HITTER. Four Cleveland hitters had this designation, including their FIRST BASEMAN AND their DESIGNATED HITTER.

The White Sox had two players with an OBP over .350. So did the Indians.

The White Sox had three players with sub-.300 SLG. The Indians had four.

The White Sox had three players with SLG .500 or higher. The Indians had … ZERO.

The White Sox had four players in the lineup hitting under .225, including their DH. So did the Indians … in both regards.

In a sense, it's rather amazing that there were 9 runs scored.

4) Ducks on the Pond!

By batting 1-for-12 with runners in scoring position, the Indians were able to strand the same 10 baserunners that Chicago did. Of course, Chicago had 14 hits and 4 walks and scored 7 runs. The Indians … did not.

5) The Outlier

… was Tofu Lou! Lou Marson had two singles on the day, including a two-out RBI single in the 4th. This doubled the number of RBI from the erstwhile catcher. For what it's worth, he has a higher OBP than Chicago's catcher, A.J. Pierzynski.

6) Slooooooow starts

The top of the lineup (Crowe, Choo, Kearns) went a combined 0-for-14 with one walk (by Kearns). Way to set the table, guys!

7) Nice hose!

Shin-Soo Choo gunned down Andruw Jones trying to score from second on a single to right. I don't recommend this to opponents as a long-term strategy.

Jhonny Peralta made a nice play on a grounder in the first to keep the damage to … well, 4 runs, but that wasn't Peralta's fault.

8) Dee-fense!

Mark Teahen made his 8th error of the season at third base for the ChiSox; Alexei Ramirez made his 7th at short. Much-maligned Jhonny Peralta has 3 errors at third.

9) Speaking of Tolstoy

Peralta is an odd case: I can't really figure out why his offense stats are down. His ISO is .163, which means that if he's hitting, he'll have a decent SLG (rather be .180 or so, but hey). His OBP-AVG is .091, meaning that he's doing a good job being selective at the plate, with 21 walks and a 36:21 K:BB that isn't terrible for Peralta (or, in fact, most Indians). In past years, he held pretty steady at a rate of in the 2.5 range (2.63 each of the past two seasons), and this is under 2 for the first time in his career (major-league average is right at 1.99). So again, if he were hitting, he'd have a good (not just decent, but GOOD) OBP.

I mean, let's say he was hitting .270 but preserved the numbers above. His slash line would then be .270/.361/.433, which is not going to win him an All-Star spot or anything, but would play. The problem is, he's hitting .236, and I'm not sure why. His line drive percentage is actually up, at 26% (career avg: 19%, same as major-league average), and usually more line drives mean more hits. He is popping too many balls up in the infield at 12%, but if that's the price for the line drives … well, it depends on how the data are measured, I suppose. His HR/FB rate is dismal, a putrid 4.5% that is well below his career average of 8.2% (or the major-league avg of 7.7%).

See, if I wanted to change something, I'd tell Peralta to cut down on the popups with more of a line-drive swing … except he already HAS a line-drive swing this year. His BABIP of .288 is below his career average of .319, but I don't know if that's significant or not. I think it is, when coupled with the line-drive rate increase: his BABIP should go UP, and instead it's gone DOWN, meaning that it can be argued that Peralta is having DOUBLE bad luck. And his extra-base hit rate is actually up slightly at 9.4%: it's just that most of the XBH are doubles.

Hell, I don't know. Could use a hot six weeks to make him an interesting trade target, though.