Well, it couldn't last forever, but it was fun while it lasted. The Indians practised their sharply-honed Squander Ball yesterday while Jake Westbrook gamely threw five shutout innings. Unfortunately, Westbrook's five shutout innings were the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, and 6th, and the Tribe dropped the getaway game to the Twins 6-0. In today's B-List, we will discuss the difference between "plan" and "execution," between "opportunity" and "success," between "right fielder" and "Shelley Duncan," and between "relief pitcher" and "Jess Todd.".

FINAL	1	2	3
Indians (40-55)	0	0	0
Twins (50-45)	0	0	4

W: Liriano (8-7) L: Westbrook (6-6) anti-S: J. Todd (1)

Some days, it is not your day.

1) Snake eyes

Craps is one of those games where everything can go along smoothly for a long time, and then one roll essentially ends your night in shame and frustration. You might make the 8. You might make the 5. You might open with a 7. Then you roll a pair of 1s, and you "crap out."

I would love to be able to say something very clever about Jake Westbrook's performance, pointing to this pitch or that pitch or these fly balls or that defensive miscue, but the fact is, Jake Westbrook pitched a perfectly good ballgame for 5 of his 6 shots at the table, and in the other inning, he crapped out.

There is nothing overly concerning about giving up a couple of fly ball outs in the first: this wasn't a pattern, as Westbrook still posted a fine 11:4 GO:FO ratio for the game. In fact, his second inning was about as sweet as a Jake Westbrook inning can go: he induced three harmless groundouts and walked Jim Thome, who hits Westbrook very well. There is no shame in walking Jim Thome: throw him a pitch you want him to swing at, and if he doesn't, you can take your chances pitching to the J.J. Hardies and Nick Punti of the world.

And, truthfully, after the four-run third, he got three goundouts in a 9-pitch 4th (one single), gave up an infield single in the 5th

, and threw first-pitch strikes to each of the three hitters in the 6th (two groundouts, one lazy fly to right). I mean, you look at those five innings, and you get this line:

5 IP, 2 H, 0 XBH, 2 BB, 1 K, 0 R

He allowed a baserunner on an error, but otherwise, that's pretty darned good, even against a lineup missing both Joe Mauer and Justin Morneau.

In the 3rd inning, of course, Westbrook was execrable: the leadoff "double" by Drew Butera was more a sinking bloop that Shelley Duncan slid through instead of catching, but much of the rest of the inning was simple Bad Execution. Walking Orly Hudson on five pitches is both rare and inexcusable. Delmon Young pounded a pitch that was about 8 inches low, so that was just good hitting by Young. Mike Cuddyer singled, which is just a missed pitch by Westbrook as far as I can tell: with two on, I would certainly advocate working outside to Cuddyer, and the pitch was middle-in. Walking Thome after having him 1-2 (both strikes swinging) smacks of pitching from a position of low confidence, and giving up a double to Hardy, hitting .249/.287/.362 on the season, suggests Simple Badness.

I guess in a sense you saw the best of Jake Westbrook (easy 3 and 4-batter innings, ground balls), the worst (concentration lapse walks, hittable stuff), and the potentially-avoidable (subpar defense). That is, if you were a contender considering acquiring Westbrook, you would see the good things he can do, try to put your team in a position to minimize the bad, and ask yourself if your team can play better defense than Cleveland does (answer: yes).

2) Ducks, pond-bound and otherwise

Francisco Liriano is clearly a very good pitcher, sporting a 3.54 ERA and having excellent stuff from the left side. He's been victimized by some poor fortune this season and is only 8-7 on the season, but it's clear that Liriano is a good pitcher.

This having been said, it's not like Liriano is Sidd Finch or anything. Yes, he struck out 8 guys in 7 innings, but he also gave up 6 hits, walked 4 guys, uncorked a wild pitch, and allowed a double to Chris Gimenez, who is only theoretically a baseball player. The Indians had 11 baserunners, scored zero runs, and left 8 men on base. Huh?

Well, here's your "huh" writ large:

2nd inning: 1st and 2nd, 0 outs: Duncan GIDP
3rd inning: 1st and 3rd, 2 outs: Carlos Santana K swinging
5th inning: bases loaded, 1 out: Jayson Nix GIDP (1-2-3, no less!)
6th inning: 1st, 1 out: Matt LaPorta lines into DP (3 unassisted)
7th inning: 1st and 2nd, 1 out: Gimemez K swinging, WP, Cabrera K swinging

The 6th inning is just bad luck: LaPorta hit the ball hard, just right to Cuddyer. Peralta had no chance (not to be doubled off). And the 7th is great pitching by Liriano. Well, I mean, except for the single. And the walk. And the wild pitch.

But the 3rd is pretty much what you want: our best hitter with a guy in scoring position … and Liriano beat him. The 5th is infuriating and requires a whole new heading. The Indians, unsurprisingly, went 0-for-6 with runners in scoring position, and in fact deserve a much lower score by virtue of hitting into two double plays with RISP as well.

The Tribe had their chances, but … well, "chances" are not "runs."

3) Pardon me, I had completely forgotten

… that Hector Ambriz was still on the roster.

I mean that literally. I was looking at the wonderful performances from the bullpen in my absence, and glowing at how we'd put together something, and thinking that everyone made

their contribution (except maybe Tony Sipp), and then Hector Ambriz pitches and I realized, "Damn! I completely forgot there was a Hector Ambriz!"

We designated two guys for assignment, lost one to Houston, got the other to Tweet bravely about the experience, and here we still have Hector Ambriz, doing what he does, which is not really a very useful thing when all is said and done.

I dunno. I mean, he's not overtly awful or anything, but … this IS Hector Ambriz we're talking about, right? We don't want to lose him back to Arizona on Rule 5, but we're willing to take our chances sliding Jensen Lewis through waivers? This isn't Joakim Soria we're talking about. This isn't even Everth Cabrera. It's Hector Ambriz.

I'm just kind of confused, that's all.

4) Postscript

Hector Ambriz wasn't very good.

5) My God, it's worse than I remembered

It is one thing to walk a guy as a relief pitcher: I certainly prefer relievers who throw strikes, but some guys will draw a walk.

It is another thing two walk TWO guys, each on FIVE pitches, NONE of which they swing at, because you are actively dripping graphite powder from your fingertips and spraying the ball all over the Not Strike Zone with wild abandon. (Hidden between the walks is the wild pitch. Huzzah!)

It is still another thing to give up a double steal on strike three (from 0-2 to 3-2, then the K), then allow the next hitter to single both runners home.

But when one of these batters is Nick Punto, who slugs .307 (three oh seven!), you are a blight.

Ladies and gentlemen, Jess Todd!

chirp

6) A word on plate discipline

One of the lazy assumptions lay fans sometimes make is to assume that “plate discipline” means “drawing walks.” Certainly the two concepts are related, in that having good plate discipline often results in a player drawing more walks than the average player, but it is possible to have good plate discipline and draw no walks at all. “Plate discipline” in its purest form means to wait for a pitch that you can drive, really hit solidly, improving your odds of getting a base hit and also having that base hit be for extra bases. Obviously this will mean something different with a 0-0 count than a 1-2 count, but the idea is that hitting a baseball is difficult, and anything you can do to increase your chances of doing this well is a good strategy. A slider that clips the knee-high outside corner may technically be a strike, but what are you going to do with it? On a 1-0 count, you can let that pitch be called a strike, because you weren’t likely to hit it solidly anyway. Of course, with two strikes, you have to swing at it. Before that, it’s probably a lousy idea.

Consider the top four hitters in the Cleveland lineup. They didn’t really do all that well collectively, getting 3 hits and 2 walks (against 5 Ks) in 16 PA. The leadoff guy saw 20 pitches in his 4 PA, which is pretty good from the leadoff guy. The 3rd and 4th hitters showed some patience, with varying success, seeing 19 pitches apiece.

The #2 guy saw 7.

Jayson Nix swung and missed at the first pitch he saw, then grounded the next to shortstop.

In his next AB, he took two balls (huzzah!) and singled to center on the next one.

And in his final two AB, he hit the FIRST pitch he saw, grounding into an inning-ending double play and popping out pointlessly.

See, here's the thing: I am not asking anyone to take the first pitch religiously. I am not demanding, as my Little League coach once did, that everyone take pitches until they get a called strike. I am not advocating maximizing pitch counts as the PRIMARY goal. What I am asking for, though, is that hitters swing at pitches they can drive (until there are two strikes). If you ground the ball back to the pitcher, that is not a pitch you drove. If you pop out to the infield, that is not a pitch you drove.

Grounding into an inning-ending 1-2-3 double play with the bases loaded is about the most infuriating thing I can think of that doesn't involve David Huff pitching. If this is Jayson Nix' hitting approach, I am greatly in favor of Jason Donald getting his playing time.

7) Welcome back!

Chris Gimemez doubled off Liriano for the only extra-base hit for the Tribe. He also threw out Cuddyer trying to steal third, although he did allow 3 other stolen bases.

You may remember Gimenez from his stint last year, which looked pretty lousy until we got to see Tofu Lou Marson. Nice to see you, Chris.

8) Hey, we had one of those!

Jim Thome posted one of the great box score lines yesterday:

AB	R	H	RBI	BB	K
0	0	0	0	4	0