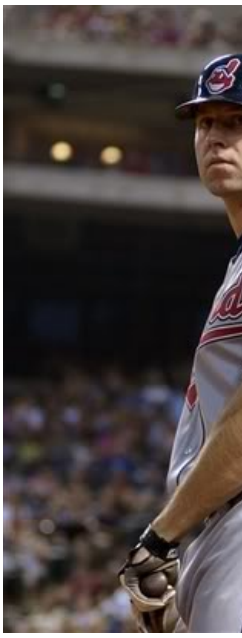
"The Kouz" burst onto the scene in his major league debut Friday night, hitting a grand slam home run on the first major league pitch ever delivered to him. In this special Tuesday edition of The B-List, Buff hits on the beginning of The Kouz Era (tm), as well as the rest of the weekend set with the Rangers and yesterdays tilt with the Jays. Buff also shows some Man Love to his boy Ferd Cabrera, and is having a hard time replacing His Favorite Player.



It's interesting to watch the games with the Rangers' broadcasters, because they seem kind of resigned to the Rangers being the Rangers. The prevailing sentiment during Millwood's outing was "disbelief."

1) Welcome to the bigs!

Kevin Kouzmanoff was the first important "September call-up," the guy who gets on the roster because the parent club can carry more than 25 guys. Since Travis Hafner was still a bit sore (more on this later), Kouzmanoff was pencilled in to DH for the Tribe Friday night. Edison Volquez did not have his best stuff (or perhaps he did: the Rangers have not been known for developing young pitchers since the Bobby Witt-Mitch Williams- Era, when they did not develop young pitchers, either), giving up a leadoff homer and loading the bases for Kouzmanoff in the 7 hole.

Kouzmanoff then took the first pitch he saw over the wall for a grand slam (and, as it turned out, we needed the runs, as Buck Showalter decided not to leave Volquez in for very long). This makes him the third player in major-league history to hit a grand slam in his first game, and the first to do it on the first pitch. It is possible that he was picking up some of the Cleveland DH Bases Loaded Vibe.

Oh, by the way, Kouzmanoff also broke up Kevin Millwood's perfect game Sunday with a solo shot with two outs in the fifth. In three games, Kouzmanoff has gone exactly 1-for-4 in each.

2) A menace to worms everywhere

It must be enormously frustrating to face Jake Westbrook, who throws a pitch that approximates fatness for 58 feet and ends up in some infielder's mitt after you hit the top half of the ball. Of course, you have two advantages facing Westbrook as opposed to a Kevin Brown,

Brandon Webb, or Chien-Ming Wang: first, sometimes Jake forgets that 58 and 60.5 aren't the same, and the mitts belong to Cleveland Indians.

Still, Westbrook threw a fairly quintessential outing, inducing 15 ground balls to 1 fly, "scattering" 7 hits through 7 innings. He struck out 6, which is more than normal, and walked 2, which is not. Only two hits were for extra bases, but one was a tater to Ian Kinsler. Still, he induced two double plays and was generally in control on a night when Vicenta Padilla was a bit more profligate.

3) In with the old, out with the new

My Favorite Player started Saturday's game and my New Favorite Player Candidate ended it, and the former kicked the butt of the latter. Cliff Lee wasn't entirely masterful, but he did plow through 7 innings in a sort of Reverse Westbrook fashion, scattering 13 fly outs and popups while inducing 4 ground ball outs. Given the manner in which Jhonny Peralta "handled" one of the grounders, this may have been prudent on Lee's part. Still, Lee struck out 4 and walked only 1, throwing a brisk 68% strikes and keeping the Rangers off balance. Oddly enough, the flyball Lee kept the ball in the park while the groundball Westbrook did not.

Tom Mastny, on the other hand, was pretty crummy, especially for a titular closer: if not for Casey Blake throwing out Ian Kinsler at the plate (*), the Rangers would have tied the score with the winning run on base with one out. Instead, with two outs, Mastny got Michael Young to hit him in the glove with a liner and everyone went home. Mastny didn't look that *bad*, really, although certainly nothing like
good
. One wonders if maybe the 26-pitch inning he'd had the previous night didn't have some effect on him.

4) Dr. Ferd and Mr. Cabrera

Ferd came in to pitch the 8th on Saturday in relief of Lee. The result: 9 pitches, 6 strikes, 1 K, two flyouts. They couldn't hit his slider, and the only question was whether it was going to be in the strike zone or not. Nasty stuff.

Ferd came in to pitch to Mark Teixeira with two on in the 7th in relief of Paul Byrd, who pumpkinized after shutting out the Rangers through six innings. His first pitch was fouled off.

His second pitch was not.

One three-run homer later, the second run Cleveland scored in the ninth did not tie the game but rather simply annoyed C.J. Wilson. Ferd also walked the next hitter before being lifted for Andrew Brown, who actually pitched pretty well, closing the barn door with the horses no more than a half mile away.

5) Everybody hits! Sorta!

Eight of nine starters got a base hit Friday, including four doubles and a homer. Grady Sizemore had a particularly good night with a pair of doubles (48 on the season), a homer (21), and a pair of walks, meaning the Rangers managed to retire Mr. Sizemore exactly nonce. The only batter not to get a hit would probably rather not hear the word "hit" in a sentence with his name, as Travis Hafner took a C.J. Wilson fastball off the right hand, which was already purple by the time he made it to first base. Having watched enough Jeff Bagwell in my time, I was already mentally scheduling the "hammate bone removal surgery." X-rays were negative, thankfully, which means that even Hafner's *bones* lift weights or something. I find it hard to believe he can grip anything requiring as much pressure as a toothbrush, though, much less a bat.

Kudos to Andy Marte, the only hitter other than Sizemore with a second hit, briefly raising his average from "pitiful" to "bad" before going hitless in his next 8 AB to return to "pitiful."

That reminds me, Aaron Boone played Sunday.

6) A matter of timing

C.C. Sabathia gave up only 6 hits in 7 innings, walking 1 and striking out 6. However, he struggled to locate his pitches (62% strikes, low for recent Sabathia outings) and managed to groove a pair of pitches to Reed Johnson and Vern Wells. The Indians tried to bail Sabathia out with a pair of homers by Hector Luna (his first as an Indian) and Ryan Garko, but those were solo shots, and Wells' came with a runner on. Aaron Hill reached base with (drum roll please) a leadoff walk. Sigh. By the way, the remaining of the 4 runs given up by Sabathia came after he hit Bengie Molina with a pitch and he was doubled to third (he scored on a groundout). So the two runners who scored who didn't hit homers had gotten on base without hitting the ball.

The helpful Tribe managed to leave 10 on base, including loading the bases with 1 out against closer B.J. Ryan. They did not score. (Hey, Ryan's good.)

7) Nice hose!

Casey Blake threw a nice one-hop strike to the plate to get the aforementioned Kinsler. (*)

Victor Martinez caught Vern Wells stealing second. This is notable to me because I watched him try to get a Ranger advancing to second on a throw home, and the throw was truly pitiful.

8) "Notable" in that I am noting it

Jason Davis threw a perfect inning last night. I had forgotten he was there. Raffy Betancourt threw one Friday, but I remembered him. I also remembered him having hair, but that might be the latest thing (see Kouzmanoff, K.).

Shin-Soo Choo is a pretty good hitter (3-for-10 over the 4 games), but as a basestealer, eh, not so much (caught by Laird, admittedly on a very nice throw).

No one is listening to me about Victor Martinez getting a day off (although Shoppach did catch the Sunday game, Vic was at first). He can hit (5-for-13 in the Texas series).

Jhonny Peralta was the only Cleveland player to have a hit in all four games. All 5 hits were singles, though.

9) Sotto voce

(*) Kinsler was safe.