



YANKEES 5, BLUE JAYS 4

Sabathia Is Uneven Again, but Hafner Provides Enough for Win



Mike Stobe/Getty Images

Travis Hafner after his fourth-inning homer drove in Vernon Wells (12) and Kevin Youkilis. Hafner's run-scoring triple in the seventh gave the Yankees the lead.

By JORGE ARANGURE Jr.
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Designated hitter Travis Hafner faced a great deal of uncertainty when he surveyed his options during the off-season. Hafner, a former Cleveland Indians star, had never been a free agent. The freedom to choose his next destination was exciting, but he was also nervous about finding the right spot. Hafner, 35, was headed toward the twilight of his career, if he had not already reached it, and a successful final chapter required the best fit.

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About six teams were interested in him, but the [Yankees](#) always seemed the most appealing. First, the Yankees had a short right-field porch that would provide little obstacle for Hafner's power. More important, the Yankees — who would be entering the season with several injured stars — provided opportunity.

On Saturday, Hafner, who is second on the team in runs batted in, rescued the Yankees from a mostly uneven start from the ace C. C. Sabathia, who allowed four runs in eight innings. Hafner's three-run homer in the fourth

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Pitching in place of Mariano Rivera, Joba Chamberlain got his first save of the year.

inning tied the score at 3-3, and his booming run-scoring triple in the seventh against Toronto's Brett Cecil provided the winning margin in the Yankees' 5-4 victory.

For a stretch in the mid-2000s, Hafner was considered a premier power hitter in the American League. But then he sustained a variety of injuries that kept him off the field. Hafner has not had more than 400 plate appearances in a season since 2010. And he was not expected to reach that many plate appearances when the Yankees signed him to a one-year, \$2 million contract. But Hafner has played so well that perhaps the plan will change.

Ben Francisco was signed to be the primary designated hitter against left-handed starters, but he has struggled (he has a .103 average with no extra base hits), while Hafner has excelled. Hafner was given the start Saturday, even with the left-hander J. A. Happ on the mound. "I probably feel my swing is better suited to handle lefties this year," Hafner said.

Hafner's above-average numbers against left-handers — he entered Saturday's game with a career .804 on-base plus slugging percentage against them — might get him more at-bats against all pitchers. Both of Hafner's extra-base hits on Saturday came against left-handers. Yankees Manager Joe Girardi said that he would consider giving Hefner more opportunities against left-handers.

"Part of it is managing him, too," Girardi said. "When you have some guys that have some age and some history of health problems, you have to manage that. You pick your days. Today, I picked to put him in against a left-hander, and he was great."

The Yankees needed every bit of Hafner's power to get a fourth win for Sabathia, who allowed nine hits and struck out four.

In baseball, it is rare to see a swift transformation of an aging player. Players usually age gradually, their skills deteriorating bit by bit. Sabathia's turn from a power pitcher to a finesse left-hander has been stark in its suddenness.

It was not so long ago — a year, to be exact — that Sabathia could still get a fastball past most hitters. But now Sabathia is a pitcher in transition.

"The way he competes when he doesn't have his stuff is probably as impressive as anything," Girardi said. "But that's how you become a 20-game winner."

Sabathia's velocity continues to be 89 to 91 miles per hour. Even while the Yankees insist that too much emphasis has been placed on Sabathia's velocity, there is no arguing that he is a different pitcher.

Sabathia's transformed style has meant different results once the ball is put into play. Entering Saturday's start, Sabathia's ground ball percentage was 39.8, the lowest of his career. That could be dangerous against a power-hitting team like the [Blue Jays](#), who entered the game third in the majors in homers.

Predictably, the game began with Toronto trying to elevate the ball against Sabathia. The Blue Jays did not hit a ground ball until Rajai Davis's groundout to shortstop in the third inning. Home runs from Jose Bautista and Brett Lawrie appeared to have Toronto headed toward their first win in this series.

"I was just kind of all over the place," Sabathia said. "Late in the game, I felt better with my fastball command and my changeup felt better."

He did well enough to give Hafner a chance to come to the rescue.



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Pitcher Ivan Nova's magnetic resonance imaging test revealed inflammation in his right triceps. Nova, who left Friday's start in the third inning after complaining of elbow pain, was placed on the 15-day disabled list, but he is expected to be activated as soon as he is eligible.

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ア・リーグ ヤンキース5-3ブルージェイズ (4月25日 ニューヨーク)



<ヤンキース・ブルージェイズ>8回に日米通算3900安打を放ったヤンキース・イチローは勝利に気合の表情

Photo By スポニチ

25日のブルージェイズ戦で2安打を放ち、日米通算3900安打(日1278、米2622)に到達したヤンキースのイチロー。100年を超える大リーグの歴史でも、過去に4000安打を達成したのは2人だけだ。

通算4189安打のタイ・カップ(タイガース)は1927年7月27日のアスレックス戦で達成。年齢は40歳7カ月だった。歴代1位の4256安打のピート・ローズ(エクスポズ)は84年4月13日のフィリーズ戦で達成。この日は自身の誕生日前日で、42歳11カ月での記録となった。イチローは73年10月22日生まれ。ヤ軍の今季レギュラーシーズン最終戦は9月29日(日本時間同30日)のアストロズ戦で、今季中に達成すれば39歳での史上最速記録となる。【試合結果】



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