



*The Indians guaranteed a series win by beating the A's 4-3 last night in a game with wild swings and one decidedly incorrect call, and Buff finds himself reminded of Indians teams of yesteryear. Starter Justin Masterson broke out the **Inning of Crap™**, closer Chris Perez channeled his inner Bob Wickman, and the middle infielders did not get a hit. In today's B-List, Buff addresses The Call, the save, and the **Crap™***

, while wondering: exactly how hard should baseball work to Get It Right?

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Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

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W: Masterson (5-2)

L: A. Griffin (3-3)

S: C. Perez (5), A. Hernandez (1)

What was I supposed to do, tell them no?

-- Wayne Garland

0) First things first

Yeah, it was a home run. I'll address it, I promise.

1) Indians Flashback: The Inning of Crap™

Long ago in a time from the distant past (also known as "2006"), the Cleveland Indians had a nominal Staff Ace who was very tall and threw hard and could dominate hitters for good stretches of games, but had an irritating propensity to somehow get derailed and cough up one atrocious inning with multiple runs on multiple hits. Here at *The B-List* we even came up with a name for this propensity: the

Inning of Crap™.

C. C. Sabathia was unquestionably talented, and shoot, won a Cy Young in a Cleveland uniform, but boy howdy, could he sprinkle in the Fail now and again. Whether this was due to a lack of concentration or hitting a valley before a second wind or an overblown overemphasis by a frustrated columnist, it sure seemed like Sabathia was good for one every other game or so.

And, of course, what made it especially infuriating is that he'd spend the rest of the game making the other team look like so many 2013 Houston Astros. Sabathia was really, really good. But he sure did have some crummy innings.

Last night, over 6 of 7 of his innings pitched, Justin Masterson allowed a total of two baserunners to get as far as first base. Four of these six innings were of the 1-2-3 variety, and the other two featured a single walk apiece. Five of the six innings featured a strikeout, and one of them had two Ks. The only hitters to get to a three-ball count walked, meaning none of the other 18 hitters saw as much as ball three. Nobody got a hit. Masterson, like the Spanish Inquisition, ruled by fear, surprise, and a ruthless efficiency.

And then there was the **Inning of Crap™.**

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In the third inning, Masterson completely lost his collective excrement and gacked up an inning that may have induced Sabathia himself to grab a handkerchief to dab at the corner of his eye. In it, he gave up two singles in three pitches, got a groundout, then gave up an RBI single, uncorked a wild pitch, and finished with a flourish with a two-run single to fall behind 3-0. He added his own Piece of Resistance by hitting Adam Rosales before finally getting out of the inning.

(Is it too early to ask when Masterson stops throwing the ball to the backstop or into body parts?

He's always had a long delivery with a lot of movement, and it isn't unreasonable to expect every couple-hundredth pitch or so to fly away, but he had 11 HBP and 12 WP in 32 starts in 2010, 11 and 5 in 39 starts in 2011, and 13 and 14 in 36 starts in 2012. Thus far this season, he already has 5 and 4 in *9* starts, meaning he hits a guy or tosses one past the catcher EVERY GAME (on average). And Wild Pitches only occur (by definition) with runners on base, so this doesn't capture any truly dismal offerings with the bases empty.)

Now, as a ostensible groundball pitcher (and I say "ostensible" because ... he actually HASN'T been this season, with an overall GB:FB ratio of 1.19), some of those groundballs are going to find holes. The good news is that all four of Masterson's hits allowed were singles. The bad news is that there were FOUR of them. In one inning. And the wild pitch put two guys in scoring position instead of only one.

Let's not get carried away: Masterson pitched a good game. For six of his seven innings, he pitched a FANTASTIC game. But for one inning ... well ... it was **Crap™**.

2) Indians Flashback: Really Big Bob

Bob Wickman was a fan favorite, not only because he was objectively a fine closer with a high save percentage, but because he was built kind of like your Uncle Laszlo and may or may not have been eating smoked sausage in the bullpen immediately before entering the game. We did love Bob Wickman.

We did NOT love Bob Wickman's "signature style."

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Wickman did not give a Rolling O about putting runners on base. Somehow the fundamental correlation between “runner on base” and “runner touching home plate” did not compute with Wickman. (I’m not saying he was dumb: I’m saying he behaved as if he was able to fully-compartmentalize baserunners as being external to his primary job of Getting This One Hitter Out Right Now.) So if a guy reached base, meh, he’ll get the next guy. I remember one game he intentionally balked a guy from second to third so that he didn’t have to worry about changing signs. The man did ... not ... care ... about runners on base.

Now, frankly, a lot of this is subjective and conveys more of what *I* felt (which I remember well) than what *Wickman* felt (which I’ve never bothered to attempt to find out). And going off the same kind of “whatever vibe you can pick up from watching television,” it DOES seem like Chris Perez is acutely aware that putting runners on base is generally not conducive to a good, clean save. But boy howdy, after getting the Gift Double from Angel Hernandez, Perez sure did hit the next batter (on an 0-1 count!) and went 1-2 on John Jaso before walking him and then finally got Seth Smith to ground out with the bases loaded.

Note that Perez threw 9 strikes in 9 pitches to the first two hitters to record a K and a groundout before Rosales hit his homer double.

3) Déjà vu all over again

Tuesday night, the Indians scored the decisive run when middle infielder Eric Sogard threw the ball badly to first and a runner scored an unearned run when it skipped past first baseman Grizzly Adams.

Wednesday night, the Indians scored the runs that would prove to be decisive when middle infielder Adam Rosales threw the ball badly to first (this time on a potential inning-ending double play) and it skipped past first baseman Jim Kern.

(Seriously, what’s with Daric Barton’s beard?)

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4) Indians Flashback: power from the people

If I time-travelled back to 2006 or 2007 and told you that the catcher, wearing number 41, batting from the left side of the plate as a switch-hitter, blasted a home run to score the go-ahead run with two outs, you would have smiled and nodded sagely.

If I told you it was Carlos Santana instead of Victor Martinez, you might have said, "Oh, I've heard of that kid, we must have traded something awesome for him."

If I told you that we acquired Carlos Santana for Casey Blake, you would have punched me in the face for being such a bullshitter.

5) New Life Goal

I want to be as happy about ONE THING in my life as Nick Swisher is about EVERY THING in his life.

I'm pretty sure I don't have the wiring to accommodate this, but I will tell you, when Nick Swisher hits a home run, he really looks happy.

6) Indians Flashback: of course they do

Cleveland's middle infielders are currently hitting .220 and .218 with OBPs under .300.

For someone weaned on Frank Duffy and Duane Kuiper, this does not seem like news, until I realize that the year starts with a "2" and I'm old.

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7) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.

Mike Brantley banged out a pair of hits and drove in a run on a double-play grounder. Well, the grounder was double-play worthy. The Oakland infield was not.

He also stole his second base of the season.

8) Ho Hum Dept.

Joe Smiff is not my Favorite Player. He's not. Do you hear me, Universe? Not, not, not, not, not! For the record, my Favorite Player is Miguel Cabrera. Are you listening? Miguel Cabrera! Not Joe Smiff!

(Smiff struck out two guys in a scoreless inning of work.)

9) The Call

In the top of the ninth, with the Indians leading 4-3 and two outs, Adam Rosales hit a high drive to left that banged off the top of ... something ... and landed back in the field of play. The question was whether it hit something OVER the yellow line (demarcating a home run) or UNDER the yellow line. In real time from 200 feet away, second base umpire Angel Hernandez called it a double. In real time watching on a small television, I accepted this call because ... dude ... I'm lucky if I can pick up the ball on a single to right, much less a high drive. It hit something. That's all I could tell you.

So the umpires, embracing the very best in outdated technology, watched the replay and came out and declared that they didn't have sufficient evidence to overturn the call and the inning went on and Cleveland won. Huzzah!

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Of course, ESPN showed eighty-seven THOUSAND replays that pretty conclusively show that the ball struck a couple-three feet OVER the line. Yep, it was a home run. They got the call wrong.

I won't bore you with my discussion about Mike Greenberg's discussion of Buster Olney's discussion of Jayson Stark's discussion. I find it hard to believe that there's a Cleveland fan out there who hasn't heard the discussion. I will say that if the umpires had the replay that I first saw the first time, I can't really blame them for not overturning the call. The call was wrong, but I can't call it Gross Negligence or anything.

I want to say this, though: Olney in particular claimed that the game should have "gone into suspense" and they should have begun today's game as a completion of that one: two outs, top of the 9th, score 4-4. To this I say, "Ridiculous." And as much as I admit that I would have wanted this if the roles were reversed, I find myself asking the question: how important is a baseball game?

I'm not talking in terms of what it means for the standings, or what happens on the final day of the season when Oakland finishes one game behind the Rangers in the A.L. West, or the Integrity of the Game or any of that. I mean, in the broader sense, what is the value of a sporting event, and how hard should we work to ensure what?

I understand that sports are only interesting when certain elements are present. The players have to be skilled. The players have to put forth a good effort. The players have to work toward the goal of winning the game. The officials must be unbiased. The equipment and environment have to be high-grade. When people aren't trying and the outcome is meaningless within the framework of the defined game, the sporting event is uninteresting. And yes, accuracy is a primary goal: baseball is more interesting with a consistent strike zone, for example, because it increases the focus on and importance of the skills of the individual players, which is a primary reason to be interested in sports in the first place.

But I think there deserves to be a line, a distinction, some sort of boundary as to how much extraordinary effort we're willing as a society to put on reversing the "injustice" of a bad call in a sporting event. In Austin, we put off calling a Special Election because it would have cost a lot of money and would have been hard to pull together in the time available. Real People in Real Life make decisions about whether something is cost or time or effort-prohibitive, and these are about things of Real Import. This may FEEL like one of those things to Buster Olney, whose

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livelihood depends on the sport and who is more emotionally-invested than the average American, but it is NOT. There is a term which would seem to apply here: due diligence. The play was reviewed. The ruling was made. They got it wrong, but they followed the procedure and made a good, honest effort. They practiced due diligence.

And that's all you get.

10) Public Service for the Google Search Engine

Jack Zduriencik replaced all video monitors in Safeco Field with Etch-a-Sketches and hired a phalanx of four-year-olds to diagram all instant replays. Four-year-olds are prohibitively expensive and this is completely false. Fire Eric Wedge.