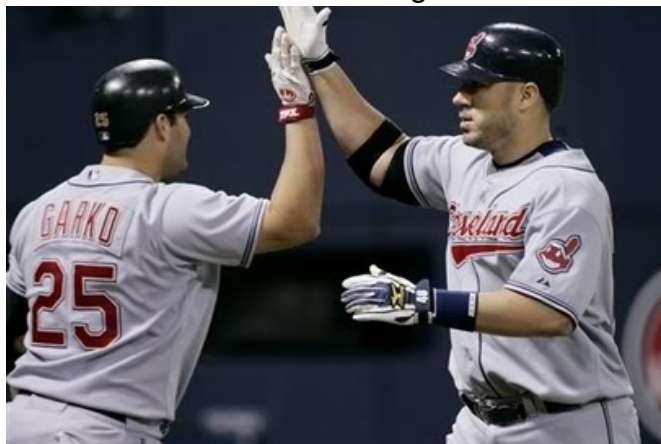


The B-List: 9/4

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

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Wow!!! What a run! With last night's win, the Indians won for the 10th time in the last 11 games. They went to 13-4 on the season against the Twins. They won their 9th extra inning affair on the year. And stretched their lead over the fading Tigers to seven games, with just 24 left on the schedule. And last night, it was the Pronk Smash that won us the game ... which Buff tells us all about in today's B-List. Buff rules!



FINAL SCORE

Indians (80-58)	1	1	0	0
Twins (69-70)	0	1	3	1

W: Betancourt (4-0) L: J. DePaula (0-1) S: Borowski (40)

While checking mail after dinner, a reader contacted me for a quick chat session, noting that he was in (college) class waiting for the game to start, and it occurred to me: if I'd had a wireless internet connection and a laptop in the mid-80s, I would not have any college degrees today.

1) The distance between "soild start" and "bject failure" is three inches

The record will show that Aaron Laffey had a poor start: he only lasted 4 innings, giving up 5 runs (all earned) on six hits and a walk. Three of the six hits were for extra bases, all doubles to left-handed hitters. His ERA on the season has risen to 5.93 and he does not seem to be functionally different from the other non-Sabathian left-handers we've been trying in the rotation (Sowers, Lee, Stanford).

Actually, this isn't entirely fair to Laffey. First off, the "infield single" that started the three-run rally in the third inning was a poor scoring decision (IMO), in that the throw, as poor as it was, easily beat Luis Rodriguez to the bag. (Actually, I'm not sure Garko shouldn't have gotten that throw.) After a sacrifice, Laffey put the next two hitters on board with a hit batsman and a walk (after Torii Hunter fouled off the first 3-2 offering). Justin Morneau then hit a ball to deep center that Grady Sizemore got to on a dead run, but the ball glanced off his glove instead of being caught. (Morneau was thrown out wandering around the basepaths, and the next hitter popped out.)

Had Sizemore caught the ball, it would still have produced a run, but instead of the run in the 4th inning being stretching Minnesota's lead to 5-2, it would have been a 3-2 game; had the official scorer not been beholden to the home team, Laffey's second run would have been unearned. Now we're talking about a guy who'd given up two earned runs in four innings instead of a piker who got knocked out on a bad night.

Make no mistake: it's hard to claim with a straight face that Laffey pitched a Fine Game last night. He didn't. For one thing, he has been making a living keeping the ball down, inducing a million ground balls: he certainly did no such thing last night (his GO:FO ratio of 7:3 is misleading due to the extra-base hits: his ground ball *percentage* wasn't very good). He's a young guy and didn't have a good night and no one's writing him off, but it shows that Laffey's margin for error isn't as great as some other pitchers: in fact, it's quite a bit like Jake Westbrook's. If Laffey can't keep the ball down in the zone and avoid the long hits, he's really not that effective a weapon.

The challenge then becomes the challenge that virtually all young pitchers face: consistency and repeatability. I'm not worried about the long-term prognosis for Laffey ... but I'm pretty sure he wouldn't be getting ay hypothetical playoff starts, either.

2) Pronk smash!

Great googly moogly, can Pronk smash.

Travis Hafner hit a ball in the first inning that is no longer round. Somewhere an upper-deck fan in Minnesota is showing his friends a dinner plate with stitches and is trying desperately to convince them that it's really a baseball. Granted, Kevin Slowey's bugbear this season has been the longball (14 in 40 IP, which is truly wretched), but if one was worried that Hafner's lingering wrist injury had sapped his capability to hit a ball over the fence, that worry appears to have been unfounded.

Although that was the most impressive blow, it was definitely not the most "important:" that gets saved for the two-out two-run ninth-inning game-tying blast to dead center off ubercloser Joe Nathan.

In fact, the first-inning shot may have been the THIRD-most important shot, in that the line shot that would have hit the base of the wall on a fly had it not been caught by a retreating Torii Hunter turned into a sacrifice fly that gave Cleveland the lead in the 11th.

On the night, Hafner went 2-for-4 with 2 HR and 4 RBI. He also walked once. One imagines that Minnesota would have been okay with more walks in the first and ninth innings. (The bases were loaded in the 11th.)

3) The application period has closed

Don't call us, we'll call you.

The position of "bridge guy from starters to Raffies" now belongs to Jensen Lewis. Everyone else can go jump in the lake. (Maybe not the best epithet to sling around Minneapolis.)

Lewis has lowered his ERA to 2.84, although his WHIP is still highish at 1.42. The latter stat is probably more illuminating for a reliever. Still, this makes three straight hitless outings of at least one inning for Lewis, and eight of his last nine featured no runs. (The ninth outing was truly miserable, featuring 4 hits and 1 out, but hey.) As important (at least to his WHIP), last night's one walk was the FIRST walk Lewis has given up in those nine outings and his first since 8/1 against Texas.

His unsustainable K rate has, alas, not been sustained, but recall that Brian Sikorski had an 18 K/9 for a short

time. K rate is not everything, even for a reliever. And this time, Lewis didn't start the inning, but rather inherited two of Terrible Tom's baserunners, stranding them both.

Has any team even won anything significant with a four-man bullpen? I'm not sure, but we've raised our Reliable Reliever Coefficient over 33% with Lewis' emergence. (Boy needs to eat something, though.)

4) Terror on the basepaths!

Casey Blake led off the 7th inning with a single to center on the first pitch from Juan Rincon. On the very next pitch, Grady Sizemore hit the ball to right field, and Blake began madly running around the bases, hoping to ... hoping to ... uh ...

... I got nothin'. When Mike Cuddyer caught Sizemore's rather routine fly ball, Blake had actually rounded second before being doubled off first. Was

it a hit-and-run? Did he think it was a double? Had he lost track of how many outs there were? (Hint: Blake LED OFF THE INNING, so there were ZERO OUTS.) Has anyone checked his batting helmet for neurotransmitters? That's just bad.

Of course, the Twins managed to sandwich two gaffes around Blake's: on Morneau's bases-clearing double, the throw from the outfield came to the infield, where a surprised Morneau stood aimlessly wandering around the shortstop area as if looking for a contact lens. (He was out.) And then Cuddyer singled off Raffy Betancourt in the 10th, rounded first ... a LOT ... and was thrown out, penniless and insane, trying to play a phonograph record with a peanut. Since the next batter, Mighty Jason Tyner, doubled to the wall as the next batter, this play turned out to be pretty terrifying indeed.

5) Flashing the leather

Pinch-hitter Brian Buscher greeted Joe Borowski by golfing a 3-2 pitch to DEEP right field, up the Baggie™ ... except that Franklin Gutierrez was playing deep and has a vertical leap. Gutierrez caught the ball, which likely prevented a run as the next hitter singled to center.

Tom Mastny started a 1-6-3 double play to help him escape a one-walk two-single inning without giving up a run.

6) Show me your passport!

In shocking news, rookie Asdrubal Cabrera was found today not to be 21 as listed in the

official guidebook, but is actually a 35-year-old seasoned veteran. Said Cabrera, "Nu?"

Seriously, the guy isn't entirely a finished product: I would like to see more plate discipline, and he doesn't seem to get to some balls in the infield that I would think he could potentially. But striding to the plate as the team's last hope in the ninth with two outs against Nathan, Cabrera calmly took a strike, took a ball, then lashed a ground rule double to center to set up Pronk's heroics.

Cabrera went 3-for-6 on the night, raising his average to .316 on the season, but as importantly, has solidified both second base

and the second slot in the order, preventing us from going to September with Blake or Jason Michaels or Kenny Lofton badly miscast as a two-hole hitter.

7) Show me your birth certificate!

Kenny Lofton is forty years old. I actually find this more credible than Cabrera's 21, in that if he were really 30, he would have been 14 years old in his debut with Houston.

Still, although Lofton still looks like Mickey Rivers when he walks, he is having a nice Ponce De Leon season at the plate, tallying

a double and a triple last night, raising his average on the season to .302 and scoring Cleveland's second run in the second inning. The triple is Lofton's 4th on the season, which is pretty awesome at 40, and ties him for the team lead with Casey Blake. (Ryan Garko is unlikely to catch them this season.)

8) Box Score Follies!

According to ESPN, Raffy Betancourt threw 20 strikes in 23 pitches. He also walked one batter. This was accomplished, I suppose, by throwing negative-one balls to one of the batters.

In the box score, Mike Redmond is listed as hitting for Chris Heintz. Joe Mauer is listed as hitting for Mike Redmond.

Redmond has one strikeout but none left on base: Mauer did nothing whatsoever and left two on base, including one in scoring position. (That was because after fouling off the tenth pitch from Betancourt, Redmond aggravated a hand injury and had to leave the game with a full count: Mauer missed strike three, and the K was charged to Redmond based on Rule 46-J: "Because we said so.")

Brian Buscher is listed as "flying out to right," which is a misprint: it should read, "Scared the shit out of

Joe Borowski in the 11th, but was robbed by Franklin Gutierrez."

The corpse of Rondell White is listed in the starting lineup and is hitting .143. That has to be a typo: how can Minnesota not have ANYONE on the FORTY-MAN EXPANDED ROSTER who can hit more than White's ONE FORTY-THREE? Oh, yeah, it's Minnesota. Sorry, my bad. (On the flip side, .143 is pretty good for a corpse.)

9) Completely False Statement for

the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro is a witch and turned Cliff Lee into a newt, although he got better. This is obviously untrue, as Lee has not gotten better. Fire Eric Wedge.