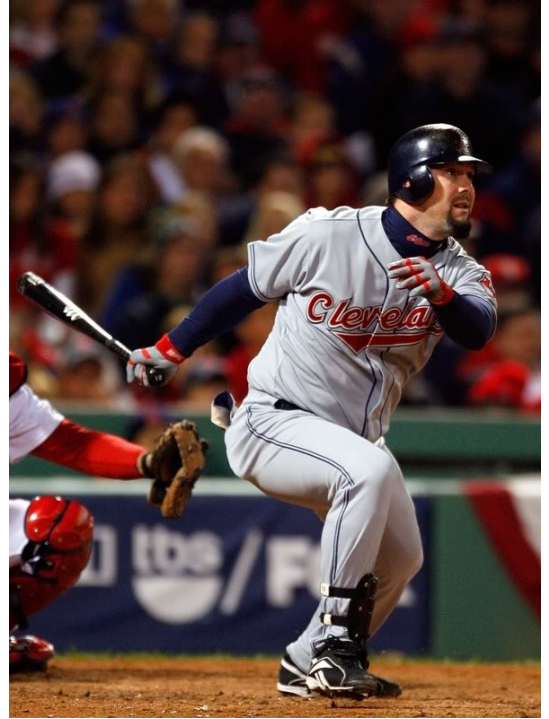


The B-List: ALCS Games 1 & 2

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Sunday, October 14 2007 7:00 PM -

I know I've been waiting for this column all weekend. And to the legions of people who emailed me looking for this on Sunday .. Buff doesn't do weekends. And I sure as hell am not going to mess with genius. In the Monday B-List, Buff looks back at games one and two of The ALCS ... noting that C.C.'s "Inning Of Crap" (tm) turned into an "Entire Game Of Crap" (tm). And apparently it was contagious, and C.C. sneezed on Fausto Friday night. At the end of the day though, we got our one in Beantown.



FINAL SCORE				
Indians (0-1)	1	0	0	0
Red Sox (1-0)	1	0	4	0

W: Beckett (1-0) L: Sabathia (0-1)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (1-1)	1	0	0	3
Red Sox (1-1)	0	0	3	0

W: Mastny (1-0) L: Gagne (0-1)

Well, the games are certainly following the expected script, except for the dominant starters, the bullpen performances, the low scoring, the defensive butchery, and the weak bench. Other than that, it's really going according to form.

Oh, and by the way: anyone who tells me the AL champ will roll through the World Series hasn't actually watched Colorado play a baseball game in the last month. I need one of those seeing stones from Spiderwick to see if it's pixies or gremlins.

1) A whole new approach!

The **Inning of Crap™** has become passé. Everyone is doing it. Livan Hernandez pulled one out last night. Curt Schilling used one to great effect on Saturday. Even relievers are getting into the act. So in an effort to put his unique stamp on the post-season, C.C. Sabathia decided that he would have to be radical. He would have to do something bold. He would unveil his secret weapon, the **Entire Game of Crap™!**

Now, this isn't entirely accurate, but then, even in an Inning of Crap™, some fellows refuse to cooperate, and you end up racking up some outs. It was no different for Sabathia: after three singles, Sabathia was able to stem the tide in the first with a double play. His second inning featured a severe deviating from the EGoC

™

Game Plan, as he struck out the side on ELEVEN PITCHES. The first two hitters went in Bugs Bunny Style, one, two, three strikes you're out. But just as Cleveland fans relaxed, Sabathia pounced with a stupenderific inning of:

A ground rule double by Julio Lugo, who hit .237 and slugged .349 on the season

A four-pitch walk

Hitting David Ortiz with a 1-1 pitch

Walking Manny (with the bases loaded) after going 0-2

A ground rule double to Mike Lowell

An intentional walk to Bobby Kielty, who couldn't supplant J.D.

Drew, who was a fungus

An RBI groundout

That's four runs, three of which were scored by people who DID NOT HIT THE BALL. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you **Crap™** !

How much would you pay for this **Crap™**? But wait, there's more: as the Indians flailed ineffectually at Josh Beckett (this is not entirely true, but it is true enough, and it is certainly true that they were not going to overcome a double helping of

Crap
™

), Sabathia retired the side in order in the fourth, including throwing several pitches for strikes, only to start the fifth:

Ortiz walked after being 0-2

Ramirez singled

Lowell walked on five pitches

Bobby Kielty hit a 2-0 pitch for a two-run single

Let us pause here for a moment. Is there a common thread to these **Innings of Crap™**? Oh yes, it was actually the revolutionary **Entire Game of Crap™**

, to be sure, but the rough formula is:

$$1 \text{ EGoC}^{\text{TM}} = 3 \times \text{IoC}^{\text{TM}} + R$$

Where the R is Random Goodness to build false hope. But really, what links the IoC™'s together? Wait, it's coming to me. Oh yes, the extreme control of the Ball Zone. I would speak of the Strike Zone, but it played no role. No, this is an almost otherworldly dependence on pitches that AVOID the strike zone. The zone in which David Ortiz is STANDING, for example. The uncanny ability to put a hitter in a 0-2

hole and then miss FOUR STRAIGHT TIMES. The ability to have to throw Bobby Kielty ... Bobby Kielty! ... a fatball because you've started him 2-0. That zone. The one that sucks.

Look, I understand that David Ortiz is a very fine, very scary hitter. Manny Ramirez is, in fact, a self-proclaimed "bad man." Mike Lowell is actually really hot. But at some point, you have to say, "You know what, what's the worst that can happen? He might hit it out. He might not. But I'm good, dammit, and let's give it the ol' college try." Throw strikes!

(This will come into play later when discussing ... Tom Mastny. Has ANYONE here read the script? I just feel like you guys are going "improv" on me here.)

2) Following the example set by my mentor

There is the old saw that mothers pull out, just after "You'll put your eye out!" but before "You don't know where that's been!" When your friends invariably do something stupid (and don't lie to me, I've met your friends), she plays the "If everyone

else jumped off a cliff, would you jump, too?" This is usually accompanied by either hands held out in frustration as if imitating a fisherman showing the length of the one that got away, or with hands firmly on hips.

Fausto Carmona jumped off the cliff.

There is a compelling sort of equality about Carmona's pitching line: he went 4 innings. He gave up 4 hits. He gave up 4 runs. He sprinkled in 5 walks, 5 strikeouts, and 6 ground ball outs. His start was a bit jittery, giving up a pair of walks in the first, but erasing the threat

with a double play (just like Sabathia). He then retired the side in order in the second (just like Sabathia), albeit on grounders and a line out. But the third was bad (just like Sabathia):

Three balls to Crisp, then single□

Three balls to Lugo, then K□

Three balls to Pedroia, then BB (4 pitches)□

K Youkilis

Okay, so maybe we're back on track here: Youkilis is a tough, patient hitter: if you're having control problems, Kevin Youkilis will certainly let you know.

Two balls to Ortiz, infield (!!!) single

Let us pause here for a moment contemplating the ball that allows David Ortiz to beat out an "infield single." (Actually, it was deflected by Carmona to shortstop, where no one was playing because of The Shift.)

Three balls to Ramirez, then BB (4 pitches)

Okay, again, Manny Ramirez is a bad man, and the bases are loaded, but two

four-pitch walks in one inning isn't just bad, it's prepostericalous. Don't do that!

Two-run single by Lowell (NOT just like Sabathia! Sabathia gave up a two-run DOUBLE to Lowell.)

Stop this shittiness, I want to get off.

Look, Carmona recovered to pitch a scoreless fourth (just like Sabathia), but gave up another walk in the process and went three balls to Youkilis in the 5th before yielding a single. UNLIKE

Sabathia, Carmona did not get the chance to tie the bow on a second

Inning of Crap

TM

, as apparently Eric Wedge learned something from the first version. (It helped that we were actually in the lead at the time.)

Here's the problem with the rotation as it stands: if Carmona pitches a second game, it will be in Fenway. Had he started Game One, or even Game Three, he'd have gotten a start at home. Wedge has made a lot of hay from using the same Book this post-season, and I'm not saying I

would have done either thing, but I have seen Fausto Carmona pitch in Cleveland, and I have seen Fausto Carmona pitch in Boston, and I can tell you which I prefer.

3) The Crap™ Bleedover Effect

Jensen Lewis, who has really been very good, relieved Sabathia and gave up two runs on three hits, and that doesn't include the inherited runner he let score.

Raffy Perez, who has really been very, very good, relieved Carmona and gave up two runs on three hits (two of the hits back-to-back homers to Ramirez and Lowell), and that doesn't include the inherited runner he let score.

Here's the thing: Perez didn't really pitch that badly: the home run to Ramirez was a pitch that Future Hall of Famers hit out, and few others do anything with. (The pitch to Lowell was Simple Badness, what can I say?) And Lewis came

back Saturday and pitched 2 1/3 perfect innings that were really crucial to the win. Therefore, I blame the starters for creating an **Aura of Crap**
TM

and leaving it behind them on the mound.

4) The "Other Guys"

Really, when I think of the

Cleveland bullpen, I think of Lewis, Perez, and Betancourt. Yes, I acknowledge that I should also think of Joe Borowski, but I have followed the lead of one of literature's great characters and cauterized the memory of Joe Borowski out of my cortex, leaving the initials Z.B. behind. I prefer to think of Joe Borowski in retrospect, rather than in ... um ... forewardspect, I guess. I would like to continually be surprised by the box score the following morning to see this fellow "Borowski" has

pitched well. It's a scheme that's working for me.

If pressed, I will recall that Aaron Laffey is in the pen and will nod sagely: I like Laffey's left-handedness and his ground-ballishness and his general unflappable unnecessary longmanitude. Good for him. Go get the Raffies some coffee, young whippersnapper.

Who I will NOT admit to having in the Cleveland bullpen are the twin nonentities of Aaron Fultz and Tom Mastny. Fultz is perfectly excusable, as he does not exist, and he proved this Friday by walking the only two men he faced to record an ERA of "blank" in my box score. Fultz was good early in the year, and now I have stopped counting on him, and I appear to be Not Alone in this regard, sharing this view with a certain Eric Wedge.

Mastny, of course, broke my heart. After decades of supporting him (okay, well, after I looked up his minor-league stats after the John McDonald trade), I called and called for him to be given a chance. And then, finally given the chance last season, he performed admirably, and my heart swelled with completely undeserved pride at having played no role whatsoever in this success. He faded down the stretch, but hey, he was youngish and inexperiencedish and he'd be ready to be a Main Man in 2007.

Except, of course, he wasn't. Mastny struggled with his command (really his sole useful skill last season, although he throws harder than I gave him credit for) and the expected results ensued. He wasn't very good, until things changed and he became even worse than that.

So, really, I considered Mastny to be the 11th pitcher, the 25th man, the one who would be replaced if another hitter was added, because he was, to put it bluntly, bad.

He got his two mopup innings on Friday, down 10-2 at the time, and big deal, he did okay. Well, actually he did quite well, giving up one hit and striking out two in two innings, but it's mopup work, and you can't draw any conclusions from that.

We were losing by eight runs: do you know how well Mastny has to pitch to hold them to negative eight runs? Who cares? This is his role, the Meaningless Inning Absorber, and Raffies are saved, and

huzzahs all around.

Well, on Saturday, there were no more Raffies to be saved. Raffy Betancourt, in fact, needed FORTY-TWO PITCHES to get through his 2 1/3 innings ... after Lewis had rebounded for a great outing and Perez had been swallowed by the **Aura of Crap™**. At this point, there's really no choice: you have to dig into you Bag of

No Tricks and pull out one of the lame, the blind, or the oddballs.

Oh, by the way, due up in the bottom of the tenth: David Ortiz. Manny Ramirez. Mike Lowell.

Now, I found myself thinking that I was actually a little

happy that the Indians did not score in the top of the 10th, because then we would have a small lead and bring in our Closer to face these three men, and although I do not recall the fellow's name (something like "Z.B."), I seem to have a vague sensation of dread when contemplating this situation. On the other hand, the gentlemen are still at the plate, and since Aaron

Fultz is only 33% qualified to face them and does not officially exist, this leaves ... Tom Mastny.

Mastny started David Ortiz 2-0. This is not an advantageous way to start David Ortiz, much in the way that wearing lead-weighted shoes is not an advantageous way to

prepare for whacking a hornet's nest with a stick. However, the 2-0 offering was not really what Ortiz was looking for, and got a called strike. Then after another ball, Mastny hopped one that Ortiz hit to shortstop and one out was recorded.

Mastny then started Manny

Ramirez 2-0. This is not an advantageous way to start Manny Ramirez, much in the way that opening all the hatches on a submarine is not an advantageous way to prepare for submersion into the Marianas Trench. However, the 2-0 offering was only ALMOST what Ramirez was looking for, and he flied out to right.

Mastny got Mike Lowell to fly out to right on a 1-1 pitch, which is almost like actual preparation.

Now, I am not prepared to call Tom Mastny the New Bullpen Weapon and anoint him the tertiary setup man or even expect him to pitch again, but I'll say this:

Wow.

5) Now closing for the Cleveland Indians, Some Guy!

There's this other guy who pitched, going a scoreless inning in each game but putting two men on base in

each outing. The name escapes me, but it's a pleasant surprise to see his name in the box score.

6) I came to play

I almost hate to write this, just on the off chance that a Red Sox Deputy Assistant

Underling reads this and passes the news to the Sox' staff, but Buster Olney has written largely the same thing in his blog, and people actually read that, so I think it's safe to admit:

Franklin Gutierrez can't hit the slider away from a right-hander.

There, I've said it. As, in fact, Olney has. But hey, it's fairly common for young right-handed hitters to have trouble with that pitch. So common, in fact, that Gutierrez' struggles look positively familiar. Oh, yeah, I remember: because I've seen the same act from Jhonny Peralta for about **four years now**

.

So, here's the naïve question, and, again, this is probably just ignorance on my part ...

**WHY WOULD YOU
THROW JHONNY
PERALTA ANY PITCH BUT
A SLIDER AWAY IN THE
DIRT?**

I mean, look, I'm not examining the proverbial gift horse here, but ... am I the only person who has ever noticed this? I don't think I'm the only person who's ever noticed this.

Anyway, Peralta went 1-for-4 on Friday, then had a HUGE Saturday, going 3-for-5 with a double and a

three-run homer off Curt Schilling. The homer was actually even bigger than just three runs, because it came immediately after Carmona's **Inning of Crap^T**
M

and put the Indians back up 4-3 in the 4th

inning. At that point, I don't know about the *team*

, but the
fans

were definitely lacking some confidence in the Tribe's ability to bounce back from being down once again.

Peralta leads the team with 8 total bases in the series. And Gutierrez? He hit a three-run homer as well,

except off a left-hander
throwing a fastball, so my
original point is not in a lot
of danger.

7) Captain Clutch!

After Mastny's heroics in
the 10th, the Boston

bullpen was in largely the same state as Cleveland's.

They had used all their Real Relievers, and thus were forced to pull from the bag of Not Helpful Relievers and come out with Eric Gagne, who struck out Casey Blake. However, Grady Sizemore hit the first pitch he saw for a single, then Gagne walked Asdrubal Cabrera

on 5 pitches. Since Josh Barfield had pinch-run for Travis Hafner in the ninth, he was due up. This is an extraordinarily bad idea, so Wedge called on Trot Nixon instead.

Now, having Trot Nixon pinch-hit is terrible enough, but it would take

a pretty hard heart and even harder head to think that Josh Barfield would be a better choice there. He's not. Josh Barfield cannot hit, and Trot Nixon is ... well, Not Josh Barfield. He is left-handed, and certainly familiar with Fenway, having played here for roughly forty-seven years

before having his hips
and knees replaced.

Terry Francona went to
the pen to get the lefty
Lopez, and thus Nixon's
role had been played out.
I mean, it's one thing to
expect Trot Nixon to hit,
but hitting a lefty, well,

that isn't going to happen.
Surely Wedge will now
call on Michaels and we
will all get on with our
lives, and ...

... what's that?

Nixon is going to bat?

You're going to LET
TROT NIXON FACE A
LEFT-HANDER?

Let's put this in
perspective: Nixon only

got 54 plate appearances against lefties. He hit .224/.286/.286. He was part of a platoon because, well, he **NEEDED TO BE PLATOONED**. He can't hit lefties. He never could, and now he is worse. He might actually injure himself at this point.

This is a **TREMENDOUSLY BAD**

IDEA.

After one ball, Nixon placed the next pitch into center field to score a run and give Cleveland the lead it would not relinquish.

After hitting the home run off Clemens in the previous series and getting a pie in this one, I am thinking that a Karma Kollision between Nixon and the Rockies would be something else.

8) Everybody hits!

Well, except Blake, who managed to go 0-for-6 Saturday. The Tribe collected 17 hits and 5 walks Saturday, and some of those were even before the 11th inning.

Blake did go 2-for-3 with a pair of doubles to

score twice on Friday. Kenny Lofton also had two doubles Friday, although he, like Blake, appeared to have been exhausted by the effort and went only 1-for-6 on Saturday.

9) Bears mentioning

Travis Hafner poked a hole in the sheen of invincibility Josh Beckett had this off-season, hitting a first-inning home run on Friday for one of the two runs Beckett allowed.

Grady Sizemore also

doubled and homered to go 3-for-5 Saturday.

Victor Martinez went 3-for-4 with a two-out RBI and two-runs scored Saturday.

Josh Barfield stole a
base.

**10) Completely False
Statement for the
Google Search Engine**

Mark Shapiro has cauterized his own brain and now firmly believes he never signed Ramon Vazquez. Shapiro has admitted this signing in public interviews, so any theoretical cauterization did not have this effect, and the statement is false. Fire Eric Wedge.