

Well, we didn't want to have to go back there, but alas it is back to Boston for game six to try and secure that elusive fourth and final win in the ALCS. Erik Cassano says that the Indians and manager Eric Wedge seemed a little shell-shocked by Josh Beckett and last night's loss, and he hopes it doesn't spill over to Beantown. Erik takes a comprehensive look at last night's game for us in his latest.



We have seen the enemy, and he is Josh Beckett. Now, it's back to Fenway Park to try and secure that elusive fourth win in Game 6.

1. Anyone who wants to place this 7-1 loss at the feet of C.C. Sabathia wasn't watching the same game I was watching. C.C. wasn't dominant, but he battled, dodged bullets and kept the game close against the best postseason pitcher currently active in baseball. When he left the mound trailing 2-1 after six innings, he had done his job.

2. Unfortunately, Eric Wedge didn't see it that way, and sent C.C. out to the mound for the seventh with more than 100 pitches under his belt. After watching C.C. play the role of cat and use eight of his nine lives to get through six innings, I had to wonder how risky of a dice-roll that was by Wedge. It turned out to be too risky, and C.C. was promptly touched for a double and a triple by Dustin Pedroia and Kevin Youkilis, respectively. Yes, the triple was aided by a Grady Sizemore misplay, but that ball was a rocket hit into the gap by Youkilis off a tired C.C. fastball.

That is the first honest-to-goodness butcher job I've seen Wedge pull all postseason. Wedge pushed his luck letting C.C. start the seventh, he had to have known he was pushing his luck, and it came back to bite him.

3. This was also the first time all postseason I've seen the Indians look noticeably rattled. Faced with the prospect of clinching the pennant at home, they played tight, made mistakes in the field, and Kenny Lofton nearly got into a bench-clearing brawl with Beckett, after Beckett apparently said something to

Lofton following Lofton's ill-advised bat-drop on a 3-0 strike.

4. Do the Indians still have control of this series? Sure. But do the Red Sox believe the Indians still have control of this series? I don't know. Fenway is a tough place for a visiting team to play, especially as they're trying to close out the Red Sox. The Red Sox know they have the veterans who have been in this position before, while most of the Indians are new to this whole postseason thing. You can bet nobody in the Indians contingent wanted to go back to Boston, yet they have to suck it up and do just that.

After seeing the Indians' shell-shocked reaction to what transpired in Game 5, it will be interesting to see their demeanor at the outset of Game 6. They've been so good at living game-to-game this season, but to try and do that while you're one win away from the World Series is an entirely different state of mind.

5. But before you become entirely filled with despair, remember that, of the three remaining possible games, this was the pitching matchup that favored the Indians the least. For my money, if I have to manage a baseball game to save the world, Beckett is my starting pitcher. He is simply one of those competitors, like John Elway and Jack Morris, who thrives when the pressure is the highest. C.C. cut-and-pasted together his best postseason outing to date, but even if he had been pulled after six innings, it still wouldn't have been enough. The Indians weren't going to score another run as long as Beckett was in the game, and that's that.

6. I think the Indians offense will fare better against Curt Schilling, who can dominate for stretches, but has also shown holes in his armor that weren't there several years ago, namely a penchant for giving up longballs. Hopefully, Fausto Carmona's Game 2 experience served as a crash course in how to pitch in a playoff game at Fenway. Fausto, from a pure stuff standpoint, is the best pitcher in the Tribe's rotation. If he can plug in and turn on in Game 6, he can be every bit as dominant as Beckett was in Game 5.

7. Boston entered this game with their backs against the wall, Manny Ramirez's fatalistic attitude all over the papers and their ace on the mound. The Indians entered aching close to a plateau we all desperately want them to reach. It showed, as Boston was unquestionably the loser of the two teams.

The Indians have to figure out a way to get, mentally, to where the Red Sox are.

Playing like you're on the cusp of the World Series doesn't do any good if it means you're playing like the weight of the world is on your shoulders. That's probably the test the Indians need to pass if they are to advance, because if you play tight at Fenway, you're asking for bad things to happen.

8. The bottom line is this: As SportsTime Ohio announcer Al Pawlowski said following Game 4, the Indians have three cracks at winning this series. If they can't win any of the three games, they don't deserve the pennant. It's harsh, but it's true. Championship teams figure out ways to win. In Game 5, the Indians, with a lot of help from Beckett, figured out a way to lose.

The Indians are learning that this is the American League, and the playoffs aren't padded with 85-win cream puffs as in the National League. You're going to have to go through the Yankees and/or Red Sox to win the pennant more years than not. To do that, it takes mental toughness and an ability to shake off losses.

The Tribe's mental toughness has just been tested. Saturday, we'll get to see how they react.