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Last night's game was one of those where the emotion shifts from despair to joy in one swing of the bat. The swing came courtesy of David Dellucci, and Buff addresses this, the quality of the bullpen, why players with arms are valuable, and much more in today's B-List. Can't wait for tonight's pitching matchup: Go Tribe!



FINAL SCORE				
Indians (15-17)	(3	rd	1.5 GB MIN)	0
Voldemort's (17-17)		0	0	2

W: Perez (1-1) L: Chamberlain (1-2) S: Betancourt (3)

Last night provided me with a refinement of my superstitious behavior, which I'll detail below, but I'll use this as a reminder to send me entries for [this contest](#) by Friday, May 9. Send entries to me at buff@theclevelandfan.com

and maybe you can outdo the TCF writer (who is inelligible for the prize, but whose story I'm printing nonetheless) who attributes his bleeding ulcer to Derek Anderson.

1) Magic

The Indians' offense scuffled again last night: the good news was that the Indians only left 4 on base. The bad news was that this was

because they only got 10 guys on base in the first place, and one of them was caught stealing second. You could argue that the Tribe only hit two balls really well last night, although Jamey Carroll did have a sharp liner go right to Wilson Betemit at third. Ben Francisco's single travelled about fifteen feet. One of our two runners stranded in scoring position got there because Derek Jeter is the Yankees' shortstop. It wasn't a very good night for the offense.

Until it was a VERY good night for the offense.

Andy Pettitte kept the Indians from putting anything together by throwing a fine array of cut fastballs and other cut fastballs, although I should take this opportunity to call Mr. Pettitte a ninny. Throwing to first to keep Ryan Garko, the slowest man alive, who had just knocked the wind out of himself on defense, close to first, is the action of a ninny. Anyway, Pettitte pitched pretty well, his only blemish being a two-run homer by Jhonny Peralta in the 4th. Seasoned Indians fans were begging for the tying run to be scored in the 7

th
, because New York rolls out Joba Chamberlain and Mariano Rivera in the 8

th
and 9
th

innings. However, Francisco and Kelly Shoppach were able to squander a leadoff single by Travis Hafner with swinging Ks and Andy Marte made an unremarkable out and Chamberlain lumbered in from Nebraska, carrying an oversized axe and riding a large blue bovine, to finish off the Tribe.

Now, to say that Chamberlain's command was not "crisp" is like saying eggs are not "durable." He wasn't in the "pure blunderbuss" category, but he did walk the first two men who deigned to try to hit off him (the second batter, Jamey Carroll, sacrificed on the first pitch he saw). Both Grady Sizemore and Jhonny Peralta had full counts at the time, and Peralta had to foul off a 3-2 pitch before walking. But he wasn't spotting the ball well, and the nasty slider that normally finishes off such men seemed to have been shelved for a credible (but much less ill-tempered) slower curve.

With a 2-0 count to Ryan Garko, Joba was able to summon his superhuman abilities to recognize that Ryan Garko will get himself out, which he then did. So with two outs, Eric Wedge sent David Dellucci to pinch-hit for Franklin Gutierrez. This was a moderately obvious move, in that Joba is right-handed, Dellucci is left-handed, and Gutierrez was putting the finishing touches on a fantastically inept night at the dish (2 Ks, both dismal).

Chamberlain's first pitch was decent, and Dellucci fouled it off.

Chamberlain's second pitch was pretty good, and Dellucci drove what looked off the bat like a high pop up ... into the Corner that Ruth Built ... for the three-run home run that

effectively ended the game. It was a 95 mph fastball up and in ... and then it was Simply Magical.

The pinch-hit homer was the 10th of Dellucci's career, and the 2nd

home run Chamberlain had allowed in the majors ... EVER.

Travis Hafner celebrated by striking out looking again. The rest of us were more exultant.

2) Managerial Back-Patters

One of the things that normally grates on me with many managers' bullpen handling styles is the rote orthodoxy in which the resources are used. I am willing to take seriously the contention from, among others, Dan Wheeler of the Tampa Bay Rays that a bullpen flourishes when each player knows exactly what his role is, but sometimes I think strategic advantage is lost at the expense of trying to preserve these "comfort zones." Bullpen management has both art and science components, to be sure, but sometimes the

decisions seem pre-made and don't take into account some seemingly obvious factors.

I've certainly gotten on Eric Wedge's case for this in the past, so in the interest of fairness, I thought I'd point out that his usage last night showed some creativity that had excellent results. (Remember: the definition of a "good decision" is the intersection of "what I would have done" and "it worked.")

After Fausto Carmona had obviously labored enough, the bottom of the sixth featured the bottom of the Yankees' order, with two of the three scheduled batters being right-handed and three of the first five (if someone got on base). This seemed like the knee-jerk opportunity to bring in a lesser right-handed reliever, saving back-end lefty Raffy Perez for the next inning when (ostensibly) the big three power lefties Bobby Abreu, Hideki Matsui, and Jason Giambi (who is hitting very poorly but did have an RBI double earlier in the game) would be approaching.

Instead, Wedge, knowing that Perez is good for a second inning if required, and had not been taxed much in a couple of 4-pitch outings, brought Perez in first, giving him two innings, and then bringing in Jensen Lewis.

I'm not entirely sure what the thought process was, but it smacked of Real Managerial-Type Thought, and that deserves some credit.

3) What a good decision!

(because it worked)

I bring up the bullpen performance here because it, after Dellucci's little-tailor-like three-in-one-blow, was the primary reason we won last night's game. Perez appears (and I say "appears" because I watched none of it for reasons outlined below) to have shown the form that made him such a formidable weapon last season, ringing up three Yankees in two scoreless innings of work, while Lewis threw a scoreless inning of his own

against that same bottom of the order. Each man posted identical 12:7 strike-to-ball ratios, and allowed one baserunner per inning.

This led to ...

4) Closer Material

... Raffy Betancourt finishing off the game with a perfect 9th

, including a freezing strikeout of Bobby Abreu after three 2-2 pitches were fouled off.

Now, a perfect inning of work isn't really that unusual for a reliever, and Betancourt hasn't been all that good this season. His hit rate is pretty high, absurdly high for the Betancourt of recent years. However, there were a few things about this outing that I liked:

- a) Raffy's last outing was terrible, giving up a moon shot to Miguel Olivo.
- b) In a hostile environment, against the top of the order, he threw his pitches, and threw them well for strikes
- c) Raffy basically told Abreu that he was going to have to hit Raffy's pitch, and Abreu finally got tired of not being able to do it and went home

See, the #1 skill for a closer is "short memory." I can't tell you for certain that Betancourt had completely wiped Olivo's bomb from his memory: Betancourt normally shows the emotion of a houseplant on the mound and looks vaguely unhappy as if he is auditioning for a remake of "The Pawnbroker." This is actually a fine thing. Some guys get hyped up, but others show the glasslike surface of composure, which is more Raffy's style.

His raw stuff might have been better, too. I don't

know for sure (see #10).

I will say this, though: in the AP writeup, we see:

" ... and Rafael Betancourt got three quick outs for his third save."

He may have gotten three *consecutive* outs, but Raffy Betancourt does *nothing quickly*.
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5) Oh, by the way

Fausto Carmona pitched.

Carmona may have a 2.95 ERA on the young season. He may still flash an excellent power sinker that induced 9 groundouts to 2 fly outs. He may still hump it up to 95 on the gun. But if he's going to walk a guy an inning and require bailing out with a guy caught stealing and another thrown out going from first to third on a single to right, I'm not actually all that excited.

6) Swish!

Of the nine men Yankees' pitchers struck out last night, seven of them were Travis Hafner, Franklin Gutierrez, and Kelly Shoppach.

Each looked preposterous in their own inimitable fashion, with Shoppach choosing to take a ball low and immediately follow by swinging badly over a ball *even lower*, Gutierrez simply swinging through pitches with lateral movement, and Hafner choosing

to rely on his uncanny ability to stand still while pitches rifle through the strike zone.

Shoppach was spared the Golden Sombrero without hitting a fair ball, which, I think you'll agree, is one of the accomplishments ever.

7) A good time for a new approach

Yes, this is still about Shoppach, but it's while wearing the tools of ignorance rather than wielding a pointless stick. I've been frustrated at Shoppach's keen practice of the Art of the Passed Ball: with 4 already on the young season, as the backup who plays less than 40% of the time, this has been a pretty irritating feature of Shoppach's game.

So it bears mentioning that Shoppach actually made

multiple fine stops, smothers, or otherwise on some of the many pitches Fausto chose to bounce onto or off of the ground. I'm not sure how many direct runs this skill saved, but it sure was a good one to display.

8) Nice hose!

Actually, I should mention that Shoppach also caught Bobby Abreu trying to steal second.

However, the more impressive throw was that of Franklin Gutierrez, who fielded a clean single in right field and hosed down the runner trying to advance from first to third to prevent a potentially big inning from getting started.

The baserunner? Bobby Abreu.

9) Box Score Follies

Six of the nine Cleveland starters sported batting averages below .250. Of the three who didn't, one was the backup catcher, and another was the man with 6 AB coming into the game.

Unable to compete in terms of raw numbers, the Yankees chose a "lack of quality over quantity" approach: although catcher Jose Molina hits only .230, the Yankees' lineup sported three men who hit not just under .250 ... not just under .225 ... not just under .200 ... but entered the game hitting UNDER .175. That's awesome!

(All three men got a base hit last night. Sigh.)

Kyle Farnsworth and Joba Chamberlain now sport

the same ERA on the season. Neither is as low as Jensen Lewis'. Each is over 2 ½ runs lower than Raffy Betancourt's.

Hideki Matsui is bloody awesome. I covet his skill.

10) Adventures in Superstitious Behavior

I watched much of the game on MLB.tv last night. Let me take this opportunity to say something: I watched the Royals' announcing team. I've seen the Rangers' announcing team. And last night I got to see the YES broadcasters. The STO team of Rick Manning and Not Rick Manning may not be the finest in the continental U.S., but we have it pretty good. It is better than any of the three I named, that much is indisputable.

In any event, around the 6th inning I read to my daughter, and around the 7th

I had to drive out to pick up my teenage son from band practice. When I returned, Chamberlain was on the mound and Jamey Carroll was bunting.

Now, Peralta drew a fine walk, and then I got to see Dellucci hit the homer. Huzzah! But we still had two more innings to pitch. Fortunately, I had the solution.

Jensen Lewis pitched the 8th. During this inning, I read another book and put my daughter to bed.

Raffy Betancourt pitched the 9th. During this inning, I folded laundry until there were

two out. I couldn't stand it, though, so I peeked in: 2-2 count to Abreu, here's the pitch ... foul ball. Okay, well, I can't watch, I'll ... load the dishwasher. No, I have to peek ... foul ball. Okay, look, you can't watch you meathead, go ... spray the cat with a squirt bottle to get her off the counter. I can't stand it, I have to peek ... foul ball.

At this point, there was only one solution. And thus, Raffy Betancourt struck out Bobby Abreu looking (I got to see the replay) while I was hiding in my garage.

Apparently I can watch the offense (until illness overcomes me, I suppose), but if

we want a scoreless defensive inning,
it's the garage for me.

11) Welcome back!

Ben Francisco had a "single";
in four at-bats.

Andy Marte, who wasn't actually gone,
but is welcomed back anyway, drew a
walk and made a couple nice plays at
third.

12) Let us not say "good bye," but rather ... no, "good bye" works for me

Jason Michaels was Designated for Wazoo to make room for Francisco. I will miss Michaels, in that he was released during my first contest of the year, thus costing me a prime opportunity to make him the subject of the Haiku Contest. If you have a Michaels Haiku, send it anyway. We'll figure something out.

Michaels departs, leaving ... wait, I'm stopping there. That feels right. Yeah.

13) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro is taking time off from his GM duties to run for President of Canada. Shapiro would be at a disadvantage here, not being Canadian, and Canada not having a President, but he can do it if he wants, I guess. Fire Travis Hafner's depth perception.