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Third place baby! And how about them Indians? NINE in a row and just three games under .500. Cliff Lee took another step towards securing the Tribe their second straight AL Cy Young Award winner. And Ben Francisco continues to look like a legitimate corner outfielder for this team. Buff's got thoughts on Cliffie and BenFran, the resurgence of Raffie, and his on and off relationship with Eddie Moo. It's The B-List!



FINAL SCORE				
Indians (64-67)	0	0	6	2
Tigers (64-68)	0	0	0	0

W: C. Lee (19-2) L: Lambert (0-1)

Third place baby! The Indians are a JuggerNot.

1) Objects in mirror are closer than they appear

It is a measure of Cliff Lee's consistent excellence this season that last night's start seemed rather pedestrian by his standards. He gave up 6 hits and 1 walk in 7 2/3 innings, a sub-1.00 WHIP, and it still seemed a little disappointing given that two of the baserunners came with two outs in the 8th. Two of the hits were for extra bases. He gave up only 2 runs, but it was an Homage to Sabathia as an

Inning of Crap

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in which Lee allowed three hits in four batters (single, double, single). And Lee "only" struck out 4 guys, well below the 7-per-9 he's been striking out

on the season.

In fact, consider this: Cliff Lee has made 26 starts. He has pitched 185 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings, given up 172 hits, 53 runs (50 earned), walked 27 guys, struck out 145, and averages 106 pitches per start. Translating these stats into an "average game," we find that Lee normally pitches slightly more than 7 innings per start (7.13), gives up 6.62 hits per start, almost exactly one walk, collects 5.58 strikeouts, and has an ERA of 2.43. So by going $7\frac{2}{3}$ innings with 6 hits, a walk, 4 strikeouts, and 2 runs on 108 pitches, this was **ALMOST EXACTLY THE AVERAGE CLIFF LEE START THIS SEASON**

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(He also averages 0.73 wins per start, so by winning the game he was only slightly above-average.)

Think about that. He almost completed 8 full innings. Through 7 complete innings, he had given up 5 hits, no walks, and two runs. He basically put up Ace Numbers ... and they slot in nicely as his average start. By the arcane Game Score metric, this start (score 62) was his 13th-best, essentially his median start. (His average Game Score on the season is 61.)

On August 10th, his 8 shutout innings lowered his ERA to 2.45.
After his August 15th start, his ERA was 2.43.
After his August 21st start, his ERA was 2.43.
After this start, his ERA is 2.43.

Since a debacular outing in Texas on June 4th that raised his ERA to 2.46, the highest his ERA has been is 2.58. The lowest is 2.26.

Now, some of that lack of variation is a sheer volume of innings pitched: once you get into the mid-hundreds in innings pitched, a single bad inning gets swallowed by the large numbers. Still, since June 4th, Lee has made 15 starts: in EIGHT of them he gave up 2 earned runs. He has two with zero runs and three with 1 run. The outliers are 4 in 7 innings and 6 in 5.

I mean, that's almost absurd.

Now, before we get all carried away by Lee's greatness, compare his start to Zach Jackson's:

Lee: 7 2/3 IP, 4 singles, 2 XBH, 2 R, 1 BB, 4 K
Jackson: 6 1/3 IP, 5 singles, 2 XBH, 3 R, 0 BB, 6 K

In Jackson's last inning of work, he allowed a single and left the game. That runner scored the third run he allowed.

In Lee's last inning of work, he allowed a single AND a walk and left the game. However, his reliever retired the side and Lee allowed no more runs.

Now, I'm not comparing Lee to Jackson: that would be folly. The reason we're impressed by Lee is not because he had One Good Outing, but because this Good Outing represents his Average Outing and he's had twenty OTHER

Good Outings already this season. Jackson has one. It could be a fluke. Jackson's stuff isn't as good as Lee's. It's just not. But I was just struck by the fact that the distance between "Jackson had a pretty good game, but nothing special" and "Lee throttled the Tigers again and is super amazing boy howdy" is ... *just not all that big*.

2) Little Big Man

Facing a rookie pitcher making his debut who sincerely did not want to walk him on a 3-2 pitch, JAMEY CARROLL turned on a grooved fastball and deposited it over the left-field wall for his first home run of the season. This wasn't a "sneak around the foul pole" job, either: it was a legitimate home run, especially coming in Comerica Park.

Lest anyone get fears of Kenny Lofton Disease, Carroll later IN THE SAME INNING took a pitch the other way for an RBI single to right.

Somehow I'm pretty confident Carroll is not going to start swinging for the fences. But congrats for the first of the year!

3) Frantastic Four: It's Clobberin' Time!

On the same day that I opined on the message boards that Ben Francisco doesn't have the power necessary to be an offensive plus as a corner outfielder, Francisco pounded a pair of two-run homers off A.J. Lopez, the second of which came immediately after Lopez hit the left fielder with a pitch.

Francisco is actually having quite a fine August,

hitting .326/.363/.512. Slugging over .500 would be a huge development for Francisco, who has not really had that much power through his minor-league career, either. Of course, he did slug .500 in May, but only .426 and .465 in June and July. You'd like to see a few more walks, but hitting .326 is hitting .326. His "isolated patience" of OBP-AVG is .057 on the season: not very high, but not hacktastic, either.

Nothing in Francisco's performance this season would suggest that he's anything other than our best offensive corner outfielder, and I expect him to play a significant role in 2009. I am hoping that August's power surge is more a harbinger than a small-sample trick, though.

4) Three-pitch Raffy

With runners on first and second and two outs in the 8th, Cliff Lee's night was over as Gary Sheffield stepped to the plate. This wasn't so much a lefty-righty thing, as Lee doesn't have a big split, but more a "you just put the last two guys on base and have thrown 108 pitches and we have an 8-run lead" sort of thing.

To face Sheffield, though, I was intrigued by the choice of Raffy Betancourt.

Betancourt's August has been his best month, as he appears to have gotten something approximating a second wind: he hasn't been flawless or anything, but he was coming off six scoreless innings in a row, three of which involved pitching more than one inning.

I wouldn't say that Betancourt dominated Sheffield or anything, but he did retire him on a foulout to the catcher. It should be noted that although all three of Raffy's pitches were on the outer half, the very behavior that drove me crazy against Vazquez in Texas, I thought it prudent with a quick-wrist batter like Sheffield in the box. He's having a terrible season, but he's still good enough to jerk a medium-grade inside fastball out of the park.

5) A heartburning twist on the Babe Ruth Legend

The poor, sick child lay in his hospital bed, fighting an unknown illness. He was visited

by his favorite baseball player, Eddie Moo.

"Please, Eddie, promise me something," he quavered.

"Sure, kid, anything for a fan," beamed Mujica.

"Please work a clean inning in a meaningless blowout, just to show me you've still got it," the boy rasped.

"Don't you mean strike out the side in a one-run game for the save?" Mujica

grinned.

"Be serious, Eddie Moo," the boy admonished. "It's Cliff Lee against Meatball McGee, Jensen Lewis is the closer, and you are Eddie Mujica. If you're going to get an outing, it'll have to be garbage time. Just promise me you'll keep it clean, okay?"

"Sure thing, kid, you can count on me!"

After Mujica's outing, the boy's illness could still not be identified, but now in addition, he had developed a nasty case of shingles.

That little boy was me. I hate you, Eddie Moo.

6) Dept. of the Unlikely

The left fielder, Ryan Garko, and Kelly Shoppach came to the plate a total of 13 times altogether. They recorded zero strikeouts.

Huzzah!

7) Box Score Follies

The left fielder had 4 AB, 1 hit, 0 BB, and scored three times. (He reached on an error before one of Francisco's homers, and was hit by a pitch before another one of Francisco's homers.)

Every Cleveland hitter reached base, although it took a plunking for Asdrubal Cabrera to get there. To his credit, he promptly stole second and scored on an error by third baseman Ryan Raburn. Grady Sizemore and Ryan Garko did not get a hit, but did each draw a walk.

Casey Fossum has a 5.34 ERA on the season and is not very good. He is listed at 6'1" and 160 lbs, meaning he has the

same build as a fifteen-year-old. Against Cleveland, his ERA is 0.87 and he holds the Indians to a .139 batting average.

8) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

David Dellucci doubled in a run and scored.

Jhonny Peralta had a pair of singles in 5 trips to the plate.

Juan Rincon met the new standard for a Job Well Done.