

It wasn't all bad this weekend. The Tribe took two of three from the Pirates, and have now won five of their last six to even their record back up at 22-22. As if the city of Detroit hasn't inflicted enough pain on us, the Tigers now improbably stand at 29-14 though. In his regular Monday feature, Buff recaps the weekend that was from the wigwam.



I alluded to the fact that the Pirates are the National League's answer to the Royals (bad record, few stars, questionable veteran signings, poor attendance, low hope quotient, not the Cubs), but truth be told, I can't tell why this team has such a terrible record. This isn't a pennant contender, but it's far removed from Terrible. Why do they lose so often? Perhaps the Steelers have leached all their karma away.

1) One of these things is not like the others

9 IP, 1 R3 2/3 IP, 0 R2/3 IP, 0 R1 IP, 1 R7 IP, 2 R1 IP, 0 R2 IP, 0 R3 2/3 IP, 8 R

Without going into great detail about K rates and ground balls and oscillation overthruster ratios, the simple matter is that everyone pitched brilliantly this weekend (modulo Gil Mota "challenging" Jason Bay) except Jason Johnson, who pitched horrendously. It wasn't a cheap 8 runs, either: he gave up 10 hits, 5 for extra bases (including three jacks), 2 walks, didn't strike anyone out, and generally looked like Denny McClain ... at 50 ... when he weighed 325 pounds and was in prison.

Look, the simple fact is that Jason Johnson does *one*

thing

induce ground balls. Well, that is to say, he does one thing that I would consider

valuable

for a major-league starter. He actually does

many

things, but giving up three home runs is not considered as valuable as skill as, say, staying in bed. The stats become terribly misleading at that point: his GB:FB ratio is 8 to 3, but this is because home runs, doubles off the wall, and sharp singles to left aren't counted as either ground balls or fly balls. A better measure would be something like Baseball Prospectus' "ground ball percentage," and the fact is, in the past six starts, Johnson's has been crummy. He doesn't strike anyone out, he doesn't prevent hits, he simply has to keep the ball on the ground, or he is a lump of coal. His fast start fooled me: his first three outings were really quite terrific. Since then? How about a 9.73 ERA?

The plan is to keep him in the rotation. No word on whether the team is planning to reimburse me for my nitroglycerin prescription.

2) From the ridiculous to the sublime

With Johnson in the role of "ridiculous," C.C. Sabathia pitched a real gem on Friday night. It wasn't

the shutout Westbrook spun, but in many ways was even more impressive: 3 hits, 1 walk, 9 Ks, 77 strikes in 102 (economical) pitches, including an induced double play. It was the highest "Game Score" thrown in the A.L. (tied with the always-hard-to-top Mark Hendrickson of Tampa Bay): without the home run to Freddy Sanchez in the 4th, it would have been the best in the majors. Not only did it give the 'pen another night off, it won a game where the Tribe wasn't able to put much up against Zach Duke (4 hits, but 6 walks and a homer) and lowered Sabathia's season ERA to 1.95.

I have questioned Sabathia's "Ace-itude" in the past, but there's no question he's our finest pitcher right now.

3) From the sublime to the only

partially ridiculous

Earlier in the year, Paul Byrd could pitch arbitrarily badly and still win, as the Tribe supported him with thirty-two runs per start. Okay, not 32, but lots. Lots more than *two*, that's for sure. So on a day where Good Paul makes a real appearance (77.7% strikes, 6 H, 0 BB in 7 IP), the Indians wait until he's showered and dressed before scoring the winning run.

Still, this is a good start. An the fact is, in his last five starts, he's given up 2 in 5, 3 in 7, 4 (3 earned, but he made the error) in

7, 4 in 6, and 2 in 7. Is this \$7M worth of pitching? Hard to argue for that. Is it pretty good, pitching that ought to be enough to win most nights? Yeah, it's pretty good.

4) Yes, that will do nicely

Fausto Carmona's return has looked like a wise choice, as his $3 \frac{2}{3}$ shutout innings in relief of Johnson were Very Nice Indeed. Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ ths of his pitches were strikes, he gave up fewer than a hit an inning, walked nobody, and

fanned two. I think his starting stint was enough to balk at insisting on Johnson's head be placed on his platter, but at this point he's an asset to the staff.

Scott Sauerbeck threw two pitches to record two outs, which is not quite record efficiency (he threw a ball and only induced a double, not triple, play), but is Quite Good nonetheless.

Raffy Betancourt threw 9

strikes in 11 pitches in a scorless inning of work. Have I mentioned I like relief pitchers who throw strikes?

5) The end of an era

Casey Blake did not get a hit Friday. Of course, he did walk twice and steal a base.

(His hitting streak now stands at 2.)

By the way, the move up the lineup looks more or less permanent, fitting in the 7 hole twice and once in the 2 slot (where he went two for 5, but K'd twice).

6) Did I say Kenny Lofton Disease?

You might want to forget I said anything. Grady Sizemore not only whacked two more homers (once each Friday and Saturday), but he came through with the game-winning hit

Sunday after whiffing
four times in five
hitless at-bats. I
could wax poetic on
a conjecture that his
recent home run
binge influenced his
regulation-inning
troubles at the plate,
but any argument

that Sizemore was a negative drag on the Cleveland offense in this series would be an interesting one to ignore.

7) Ducks on the pond!

Ducks weren't a

problem Friday, as
one of the *three*
Pirates who ran the
bases was erased
on a double play.
And ducks weren't
really the problem
Saturday, as
Johnson threw four

innings of BP (we scored six runs on seven hits, hard to argue a lot of inefficiency there anyway). But on Sunday, we appeared to try very, very hard to

squander the game
with fourteen left
hanging, an
astonishing SEVEN
in scoring position.
The fact is, when
you stroke seven
doubles in eleven
hits, draw five

walks, and benefit from an error to boot, scoring three runs is astoundingly bad. (Striking out twelve times against luminaries such as Pat Maholm, Matt

Capps, and
Salomon Torres,
who I think once
pitched with
Warren Spahn,
does not help.)

**8) A ray of
acceleration**

Two things struck

me as odd this weekend: the aforementioned appearance of Blake in the two hole instead of blindly putting the left fielder (in this

case,
Hollandsworth)
there, and the fact
that Merely Big
Bob came out for
a second inning of
work. Not only
was Wickman

stretched past
one inning,
something that
last happened in
1943, but he was
brought into the
game in a
non-save

situation. And it was exactly the right move: we were putting guys on base all over the place, and Wickman is our best short-term

run preventer. He isn't our best pitcher or the one with the best ERA, but the fact is, for all the performance analysis in the

world, Wickman gives up less than would lose the game. (His ERA is a quite-fine 2.77, BTW.)

Inertia is defined as a body's

tendency to
remain in the
same state in
which it starts:
that is, it stays at
rest, or continues
its path. The
thing that

changes inertia is
accelerating,
either from rest to
begin moving, or
to change
velocity (as a
vector, so
including

direction). I can't tell if Eric Wedge is moving from rest or simply changing direction, but he did move.

9) Hey, we had

one of those!
Lou Merloni's
promotion to the
biggs could have
been more
productive. That
is, any
production

would have
been more. He
went 0-for-6 with
2 Ks, although
he did drive in a
run and laid
down a sacrifice,
meaning that he

is roughly 0.00%
better than
Ramon
Vazquez. We
will see if he is
able to maintain
this level of Not
Production at

the level
established by
Vazquez. (I
kinda hope not.)
**10) Your
baserunning
bores me, I tire
of it**

Sabathia was a
piker, inducing
but one double
play. Saturday
and Sunday,
the Tribe turned
THREE each,

including a
3-6-1. I
mentioned that
I like watching
the 3-6-3: I *hate*
watching the
3-6-1, as I

expect the
pitcher to die.
On the other
hand, it was
Paul Byrd.