

Just three outs away from their first series sweep in months, the Tribe fell apart in the 9th inning last night thanks to bone headed errors by defensive replacement Kelly Shoppach and soon to be 2nd baseman Jhonny Peralta. Buff gives his thoughts on the Tribe's Three Mile Island impersonation, as well as his usual cornocopia of observations from last nights loss.



I used to be disgusted, Now I try to be amused.-- E. Costello

1) Young man, a proper hotfoot involves inserting the matches into someone ELSE'S shoe

I'm not sure I can do justice to just how squanderiffic last night's loss was. The fact is, I was very excited to see the Tribe come back in the eighth inning: it is unusual for a team 2 runs down as late as the 8th take the lead. And it was a pretty strange rally, involving significantly bad defense (by St. Louis) and enough good karma to suggest some sort of cosmic balancing or smiling Fortune.

And then the Indians showed ... well, I dunno whether it makes sense to make any sort of sweeping global generalizations for a very, very bad inning all around. The defense was bad, but at least Really Big Bob couldn't throw strikes and gave up a booming double to allow the tying run to score. To blame this on Wickman is disingenuous, but the phrase "comedy of errors" doesn't seem to fit, as "comedy" implies "humor." To me, the combination of Kelly Shoppach botching a popup and Jhonny Peralta channelling Steve Sax smacked more of "pathos."

2) Mr. Westbrook's neighborhood

Jake Westbrook has quietly put up six pretty good outings in a row, and sports a 4.37 ERA for the season. This is not terrific by any means, but it's still pretty good. He certainly cruised through the first three innings, which featured a strikeout of Albert Pujols (5 of six pitches strikes) and a 3rd inning in which all 10 pitches were strikes (2 Ks). More than GB:FB ratios (a typical 10:3), more than hittable pitches or home runs, Jake's biggest predictor of success is his control: with good control, you get a 10-pitch 1-2-3 inning. With bad control, you end up prolonging innings and giving up 2 runs in the 4th. Still, Jake settled down except for one mistake to Scott Rolen in the sixth.

3) The microcosmic bullpen

If you wanted to show someone the general idea of our right-handed short men this season, you could do worse than to point them to this game.

Raffy Betancourt came in, threw strikes (8 of 12), and efficiently finished a scoreless inning. He can certainly give

up runs sometimes, but this is his typical approach at least.

Fausto Carmona came in, did NOT throw strikes (12 of 22, 2 BB) and Inefficiently finished a scoreless inning. With two men on base, he sawed through Rolen and Juan Encarnacion, showing the "stuff" that makes him a guy to watch.

Bob Wickman came in, walked the tightrope, and fell off this time. More often than not, he doesn't fall, but it's rare that he simply stands on solid ground.

4) Saint Grady

Given the typical Gestalt

experiment of needing one hit to win a game, it could be argued that Travis Hafner is an obvious choice. The man has an OPS over 1.070, fer crine out loud. However, it would be hard to argue against the late June version of Grady Sizemore, who posted 4 of Cleveland's ten hits and extended his hitting streak to 10 games. He also stole his second base off Yadier Molina, which is like dunking twice on Shaq in a home-and-home.

He's good.

5) Mortal Grady

He's good at *hitting*, that is.

His defense, well, that's not so awesome. In the aforementioned 4th inning, Sizemore made a bad decision to try to get Rolen at home on Encarnacion's single, allowing Encarnacion to advance into scoring position. (The next guy walked, so it did

no global harm, but it's still a bad play: bad decision compounded by poor execution.) Then when Molina singled and he DID have a shot at getting the runner at home, he appeared to try to throw before actually catching the ball, allowing the run to score without contention. Now, Grady Sizemore is not a bad center fielder.

Grady Sizemore is actually a pretty good center fielder (good speed, takes good angles, arm's not bad: he's not Andruw Jones or Brian Anderson, but he's pretty good). But last night was not a good one for him in the field.

6) Managerial Huzzahs!
I get on Eric Wedge's

case a lot because he frustrates me and I think he's a significant reason that the Indians are struggling this season. However, in the spirit of fair play, I shouldn't just gloss over things he does well, too. His handling of the pinch-hitters in

the 8th was masterful, knowing that Sooper Genius LaRussa would jerk his knees out of their sockets trying to match up lefties and righties: he brought in Johnson to turn Martinez around and then face Broussard. Bringing in Perez

forced Johnson out of the game, and now you have your best (Hafner) facing their titular closer (Isringhausen), with the lefty Hollandsworth behind him. Nicely done, although it did squander Perez, but then, so what? It may have been unfortunate

in hindsight to move Vic to first and Shoppach to catcher instead of leaving a Perez or Hafner at first, but the move made a lot of strategic sense (and Shoppach is SUPPOSED to be the superior fielder, so the irony of him blowing the

game is pretty bitter). I also liked how he managed the bullpen, giving Betancourt the easy bottom of the lineup to saw through and showing trust in Carmona to a) face the meat of the order and b) leaving him in after walking two guys.

Sending Sizemore against Molina was gutsy, too. Nice game by the Inertial One.

7) Managerial Head Scratcher

Still, there was one (set of) move(s) that gnawed at me: Jake Westbrook singled in

the third inning,
raising his average to
.500. Yes, it's 2-for-4.

No, that's not
significant. Jake
Westbrook is NOT
the best hitter on the
Cleveland Indians.

He's not. I know this.
However, in the fifth,

after Carpenter gave up a hit to Franklin Gutierrez, his decision to have Westbrook sacrifice smacked of rote thinking. Hey, it worked: Sizemore drove Gutierrez in with a single. Job

well done. Still, do you call on good hitters to sacrifice with no outs down by two runs in the fifth? I dunno, that's defensible, but I hate bunting (although not as much as *Cliff Lee* bunting).

What is NOT defensible is bringing in Ramon Vazquez to pinch-hit for Westbrook in the 7th. First off, Westbrook had only thrown 88 pitches, but his sixth wasn't

smooth, so you can
make a case for
pinch-hitting to
replace him in the
bottom of the frame.

That's okay. It is
NOT okay to
replace him with
Ramon Vazquez,

who is, in the words
of Rivers Cuomo,
"just a
no-class beat-down
fool, and (he) will
always be that
way." He
can't hit. Just can't.
Can't, can't, can't,

can't, can't. He
"hits"
.163. He can't hit.
Do not use him as a
pinch-hitter.
Defensive
replacement, I can
see. Hot dog
vendor, all right.

Pinch-hitter, no.
It's this simple: use
an actual hitter, or
let Jake hit. Jake
Westbrook has a
better chance of
doing something
positive with the bat
than Ramon

Vazquez. It sounds ridiculous, but it is not.

By the way, I think Ramon Vazquez is a bad hitter. I didn't want that to slip by you there.

8) Credit Where

Credit Is Due Dept.

I get on Todd
Hollandsworth's
case a lot
because I think
he is terrible and
is an insignificant

reason that the
Indians are
struggling this
season.

However, in the
spirit of fair play, I
shouldn't just
gloss over things

he does well, too.

Fortunately for
me, I don't have
to. His

"hit"

and

"RBI"

in the 8th were
the result of a
preposterously-pl
ayed glorified
popup. Corner
outfielders
cannot survive
below the

Mendoza Line.

Marvin K.

Hollandsworth,

will you please

go now?

9) Irrelevant

Comment

I have a

solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis: install Isiah Thomas as the Prime Minister. Within two years, Iran

will be run so
deeply into the
ground that it
can simply be
annexed.

How can one
man be

Soooooooooooo

o incompetent?

At

EVERYTHING?

Astonishing.