Five wins in a row, 12-7, and all alone in first place. This is something we are not accustomed to as Indians fans since in recent years this team has gotten off to horrible starts. Buff chimes in today with another installment of the B-List, and looks at Paul Byrd's start, Choo's arm, Nixon's contribution offensively, the bullpen, and more from yesterday's game.

FINAL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	**R**	**H**	**E**
Rangers (8-13)					0						1	0
Indians (12-7)					3						2	0

W: Byrd (2-1) L: Loe (1-1)

Despite the small sample size, one is tempted to conclude that Texas pitching, which has been so poor in recent years, is, in fact, still not good.

1) For my next trick …

Paul Byrd pitched one of the games you'll ever see yesterday, giving up N+2 hits in N innings, but walking only 1 and giving up only N/2 runs to get the win.

In this case, N = 6, but in several years of watching Paul Byrd (I admit, I followed him because he was in the Indians' system Once Upon a Time, which is slightly sad), Byrd throws stuff, guys hit stuff pretty well but not really well, Byrd wanders off the mound, Indians in decent shape. There are outliers where he's got one exceptional pitch that guys never figure out and he gets a shutout, and others where he throws Special Order Meatballs and has to leave in the second, but generally speaking, what you get from Paul Byrd is a whole lot of mode and not so much tail.

Now, to Byrd's credit, he had nothing yesterday. In fact, in interviews, he said, "Boy, I had nothing." (Not a direct quote, but not a bad paraphrase.) However, since Byrd is that breed of Experienced Pitcher, he worked with what he could, changing speeds a bit, using guile and Vaseline and guile to get through a Texas lineup that can hurt bad pitchers. And it's a testament to how effectively clever Byrd can be that 4 of the 8 hits were for extra bases and he only gave up three runs. It's also a testament to good fortune and timing, where the good fortune was having Shin-Soo Choo playing left field and the timing was to give up the titanic shot to Sammy Sosa with the bases empty.

Anyway, it'd be pretty hard for the objective observer to either:

a) claim that Byrd pitched really well and you felt comfortable watching him

b) complain that getting a Quality Start and a 3.50 ERA from your fifth starter is woefully inadequate and must be addressed pronto

2) Nice hose!

This is usually just a little note to express appreciation for a fine outfield assist, but in this case, it largely redefined the entire tenor of the game: after letting the first three batters reach base, Byrd faced cleanup hitter Mark Teixeira with the bases loaded and no one out. Although Kameron Loe is not exactly Johan Santana out there, you hate to start batting in the bottom of the first having to climb out of a hole. Byrd induced Teixeira to fly out to left, where Shin-Soo Choo was playing in place of the injured David Dellucci.

Now, Choo normally plays right because he has a good arm. He also takes sort of chicken-in-a-pen-like random paths to fly balls, but he *can* throw the ball. The ball was not real deep, but Kenny Lofton was on third, and his league-leading 9 stolen bases suggest that he is either still fast or still believes he is fast. Anyway, Lofton tagged up.

Choo threw the ball home: at it's highest point in the flight, it was about 5'8" off the ground. At it's lowest point it was about 5' 7.5" off the ground. Okay, that's not entirely true, but it was a *laser*. Apparently, this actually surprised Choo. Another person surprised by the throw was Kenny Lofton, who was out by about 5 feet. Sammy grounds out, inning over, Paul Byrd begins impressing the bat boys in the dugout by pulling live pigeons from his hat.

It was a good throw.

3) Welcome aboard

Trot Nixon is not generally known for his great power and wasn't brought to Cleveland to supply it. In fact, I think he was envisioned as more of a two-hole get-on-base hitter who would also increase the Gritty Guttiness Coefficient of the Indians. However, with two on and two out in the first, Nixon golfed a mediocre Loe curveball into the right-field seats to extend the Indians lead to 3-0, a lead that they never relinquished. It wasn't a watershed moment, exactly, but combined with Choo's throw, it seemed to give the team a relaxed "We've got this one" vibe.

4) The quasi-inverted batting order

Three of the top four hitters were held hitless yesterday, although, in fairness, as a group they reached base 7 of the 19 times they went to the plate on the strength of 3 walks by Casey Blake and 2 more by Travis Hafner.

However, EVERY one of the 5-9 hitters had a hit, including a home run by Jhonny Peralta and a single by Josh Barfield. If the middle infield ever rises to the lofty standards set by the Jack Brohammer-Frank Duffy combo of my youth, this offense could be quite good indeed. (Being greedy, I would like more.)

By the way, the 3 walks by Blake add to the logic behind moving him up in the order: he's a patient hitter who will work counts, is reasonably fastish to avoid hitting into a lot of double plays, can actually bunt (a rare skill on this squad), and seems to have a better approach without a lot of guys on base. Note that one of his walks was with the bases loaded, removing one of the last obstacles to considering Blake an asset rather than a liability. (In fairness to those who are not enamored of Mr. Blake, he is still hitting .200, which is still rather obstacular.)

5) Ducks off the pond!

I remain impressed by the team's ability to work a walk, although less impressed that said walks were worked off Texas pitching. Still, we drew seven walks to got with 9 hits.

In contrast to other games, we were pretty efficient with the baserunners: 9 runs, 6 left on base, only 2 in scoring position. In fact, in the sixth inning, we had the bases loaded with two outs, and SCORED THREE RUNS! It's true! We got a hit with the bases loaded! That's four, baby! Mendoza, here we come!

Of course, the hit didn't leave the infield, and two of the runs scored when Scott "Who?" Feldman and Ron "Oy" Mahay couldn't throw adequate strikes to either Blake or Hafner, but … we scored with the bases loaded! Now is the time on "Sprockets" when we dance! Uh, uh, uh.

6) Bullpen Roundup

I'm afraid to start taking these guys for granted, so I'll keep mentioning them. Tom Mastny came in, two innings, high quality, ho hum. Really, he was one (admittedly extremely putrid) pitch away from two perfect innings of work, but the pitch was a curveball that Sammy Sosa banged off the home run stripe. Frankly, I'm not convinced it was a homer instead of a double, but … c'mon, it was 8-3. You're not going to win that argument. Give Sammy his homer, he's hitting .239.

Jason Davis came in and Jason Davised me. It was pointed out to me that it would be unfair to criticize Davis for being rusty, seeing that he hadn't pitched in 8 days. Grudgingly, I accept this, although I will point out that 10 strikes in 20 pitches is kind of blunder-Motan, especially given that the ratio after 7 pitches was 1:6, and two of the balls were to Gerald Laird, about whom I've already ranted. To Davis' credit, he settled down, and after a bunt single (I am not going to get up in arms about allowing a bunt single), he retired the next three hitters harmlessly

and that was enough of that.

We actually have the problem of having enough innings for guys like Davis and Mastny and Betancourt to stay “sharp.” It’s a good problem to have, given that Betancourt has documented problems going 3 straight (sometimes even back-to-back) and Hernandez is fifty-seven, but at some point we are going to have to fish or cut bait here, where the “bait” is, in all likelihood, Davis.

This having been said, if Matt Miller becomes a viable option, the only guy in the bullpen with an option is Mastny. Sending down Mastny for Miller seems counter-productive to me. Admittedly, I am virtually Mastny’s agent. But he’s been good.

7) Ho Hum Dept.

Grady Sizmore stole a base.

Shin-Soo Choo struck out twice.

8) My semi-annual quixotic rant

Victor Martinez took another collar yesterday, going 0-for-4, although he scored a run (got on with a fielder’s choice) and drove one in (with a ground ball). And he played first base, so I know he wasn’t catching. And I know that Victor has stretches of not hitting now and again and likes to swing through them. But he COULD rest. Really. Sigh.

9) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro snuck into the local animal shelter last night and shaved all the cats, dogs, and guinea pigs, then fashioned the fur into a giant rainbow wig and gave it to a fellow holding a “John 3:16” sign at the bus terminal. If you believe this statement, you should check your local animal shelter: it is not true. Fire Eric Wedge.