Uhhhh ... Fausto Carmona is good. Really good. Carmona was simply spectacular in hurling a four hit shutout of the Twins yesterday, improbably defeating Johan Santana for the second time this season. And as Buff says in todays intro, today's column is short, primarily due to the fact that there are a limited number of ways to write "Fausto Carmona is great" without looking like a stalker.

FINAL SCORE				
Twins (18-22)	0	0	0	0
Indians (24-14)	0	0	0	0

W: Carmona (5-1) L: J. Santana (4-4)

Gonna be another short one, some due to a previous commitment, but a significant amount due to the simple low number of Actual Events in the game. That doesn't mean it wasn't a great game, just that there are a limited number of ways to write "Fausto Carmona is great" without looking like a stalker.

1) Your Johan Santana bores me, I have something better

Fausto Carmona broke his nine hundred thirteen game losing streak by improbably beating Minnesota Ace Johan Santana in the Metrodome. This was notable in that not only is Santana terrific (a consensus Cy Young favorite from many pundits scattered about cyberspace), but he is even more unbeatable in his

home stadium. Still, there is the notion of the blind squirrel and the fortunate rookie and the Tale of Bob Wolcott from days gone by, and it was not significantly more than a one-game blip, albeit a very nice performance by Carmona.

After that game (in which he gave up 2 runs on 6 hits in 7 2/3 IP), Carmona has simply looked like Cleveland's best starting pitcher, winning three more decisions and pitching deep into groundball-laden ballgames. So it was not completely unexpected that Carmona would pitch well against Santana in Jacobs' Field, it was more the misfortune of having to face a potentially-great Santana head-to-head. One of the things that Santana does is remove our starting shortstop from the lineup: Jhonny Peralta has such dreadful lifetime numbers against Santana, it is unthinkable to print them out loud. Also, two of our best offensive threats are pure left-handers (Sizemore and Hafner), although Hafner doesn't have any real platoon split (he homered against Santana last time).

True to form, Santana was tremendous: through six innings, Santana struck out at least a batter an inning, striking out nine Indians while allowing a paltry two hits and a walk. The best "threat" the Indians mounted was when Jason Michaels walked, was balked to second, and took third on a wild pitch. He did not score. However, with poor Mike Rouse (a left-handed hitter) pressed into action by Peralta's fragile psyche and fragiler bat against Santana, it is fairer to simply note that Rouse inability to drive in Michaels with two outs in the inning was more a function of Santana making everyone look bad rather than some misguided lamenting about a lack of clutch hitting. (There was a *universal* lack of *any* hitting, so to complain specifically about this single "clutch" situation seems pretty petty.)

Faced with such an opposing (and imposing) performance, all Carmona did was shut the Twins down with few real opportunities. He did give up a double and walk in the second, but got Garrett Abalone to ground out to end the inning. In the fifth, Nick Punto made a two-out single more exciting by stealing second, but Luis Castillo grounded out to end the inning on the next pitch. Through six, Carmona gave up three hits and a pair of walks, but no runs, and only one other Twin got as far as second, where he was left stranded after Jason Kubel grounded out to end the 4th.

You may have noticed a recurring theme here: I've lauded Carmona's GB:FB ratios as an extreme groundball pitcher in previous columns. Last night's game was no exception, in which Carmona logged a preposterous SEVENTEEN ground ball outs (to 6 fly ball outs, 4 Ks, and a doubled-off baserunner on a popped-up bunt). By all reports, Carmona threw a very good sinker yesterday: in fact, he threw said Very Good Sinker over ONE HUNDRED TIMES. He basically threw one pitch. Over and over. Because it could not be hit.

Rather than tiring, Carmona had perfect 6th, 7th, and 8th innings before allowing a baserunner in the 9th. Mike Cuddyer, after several foul balls, finally hit a ground ball that Blake was unable to convert into an out (Cuddyer was credited with an infield single). The next batter hit a ground ball out. The next batter hit a ground ball out. And then the game was over.

Sending Carmona out for the ninth even though he'd passed the mythical 100-pitch mark (barely) through eight might seem like a needless risk, but the man had just completed three perfect innings and is a Large Person throwing a pitch that isn't stressful like a slider or split-fingered fastball. Although I generally err on the side of caution with young pitchers (25 and under, certainly, which describes Carmona), there was the mitigating factor that the Indians only led 2-0 at the time and actually still needed to win the ballgame. You normally bring in the closer because he has the best chance of getting the opponents out at that stage of the game: I would be interested in hearing an argument to the effect that someone believed that

there was a pitcher available to the Indians that was more likely to retire Minnesota Twins in the 9th than Fausto Carmona.

All told, Carmona finished with 76 strikes in 121 pitches and lowered his ERA on the season to 2.55. Taking away his first bad start after a long unscheduled break (from the snow), Carmona has a 1.60 ERA, giving up 8 earned runs in 45 innings over 6 starts. His shortest of those starts was 6 innings, and he finished the 7th in all the rest. Even with his bad start included, his WHIP is 1.14 and he is holding opponents to a .230 batting average. And he has a GB:FB ratio of umpty-million. He could have a little better control, but it's hard to claim that he needs better
command
.

My guess is that when Jake Westbrook comes off the DL, it will not be at Fausto Carmona's expense.

2) Vic smash!

Santana was not entirely pinpoint with his control, but he did record 11 strikeouts and only 1 walk. Johan Santana can pitch. So when he started Victor Martinez off 2-0 in the 7th inning, I found myself idly musing that maybe he was losing his command a bit.

His next pitch was not a ball. Nor was it a strike, nor a fungus. But it was deposited some three hundred eighty-odd feet from home plate (a wild guess) as Martinez blasted the belt-high offering into the left field plaza for a home run. It was Cleveland's third hit of the game. They would only get one more.

3) Gark smash!

Two pitches later, Ryan Garko hit a second solo

shot off Santana, which, the way Carmona was pitching, effectively ended the game. Garko is now hitting .312 and slugging almost .500 (.495), yet only has 12 RBI. Part of this is batting behind base-clearers, but a larger part of this is that while Garko hits .375/.435/.571 with the bases empty, he hits only .240/.278/.360 with runners on base and a Blaketastic .200/.276/.320 with runners in scoring position. The numbers actually drop off sharply when "two out" is added to the situation (although the numbers of plate appearances becomes laughable in their smallitude).

I'm not claiming that the sample size in any of these cases is large enough to consider important, but I do find it interesting, if only because this was a major selling point of Garko last season: the more run-producing the situation, the better he hit. This season, it's

been just the opposite. I'll certainly take the .312/.361/.495 overall, but it sure would help if more of those hits drove in more of those baserunners.

4) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Travis Hafner and Casey Blake each singled. Everyone else ... well ... did not.

Martinez and Michaels were the only Cleveland batters not to strike out, and Michaels had the aforementioned walk: in terms of generating Actual Offense, the three single-base transactions resulted in what Sandy Squirrel from SpongeBob SquarePants might term, "Almost some!"

5) And we appreciate the sacrifice!

Mike Rouse took it on the chin yesterday, striking out three times in three plate appearances. However, he did save Jhonny Peralta the ignominy of striking out four times in three plate appearances, which, given Peralta's history against Santana, I would not have totally ruled out as a possibility.

6) A big thanks to the readers out there!

Thanks to literally pairs of readers out there, I was alerted that "J DePaula" is actually *Julio* DePaula. DePaula's main claim to fame is that he induces ground balls and posts average stats in the minors, meaning that it was totally expected that he would dominate

the Indians, being exactly the type of pitcher that does this. He also has a functional shoulder, which puts him one up on Jesse Crain, who, according to initial reports, has torn *both*
his rotator cuff
and
his labrum, which is Latin for, "Your shoulder is ground chuck."

In all seriousness, that's a bad injury for Crain, and I hope he can return to the major leagues, preferably with someone other than Minnesota.

7) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro celebrated last night's win by

sending Fausto Carmona down to AA Akron, where he will learn to develop a screwball. I shouldn't need to tell you that this statement is completely untrue, but I am, because it is. Fire Eric Wedge.