It's Monday, and the another edition of the B-List looking back on the weekend set with the Cincinnati Reds. Buff takes a deep look into each game as only he can, offering up thoughts and analysis on things such as Paul Byrd throwing strikes, Cliff Lee's start on Friday, Sowers stuck in Suckville, Peralta and Garko's offensive surgence, and more.

FINAL SCORE				
Reds (16-26)	0	4	0	0
Indians (25-14)	1	6	2	0

W: C. Lee (2-0) L: Lohse (1-5)

FINAL SCORE				
Reds (17-26)	0	1	3	0
Indians (25-15)	1	0	2	0

W: Belisle (4-3) L: Sowers (0-4) S: Weathers (8)

FINAL SCORE				
Reds (17-27)	0	2	0	0
Indians (26-15)	0	0	1	4

W: Byrd (4-1) L: Harang (5-2) S: Borowski (13)

You know, the Reds are really a lot like us, except they suck.

1) I have found the strike zone to my liking, and have no immediate plans to

leave it

Last April , I did not care for the way Paul Byrd was pitching. A good chunk of this had to do with the fact that he might give up some hits, maybe some runs, probably not a ton of strikeouts, but by golly, at least he wasn't going to walk anybody. (A careful reader might also discern some misgivings about Danny Graves' role: primarily, that it involved pitching.)

Through seven innings yesterday, Paul Byrd gave up two runs on 6 hits, striking out three and walking zero. The zero walks is becoming a bit of a habit for Byrd, who has gone four starts of 6 2/3, 7, 7, and 7 innings without issuing a free pass. He last walked a hitter on April 26th against the Rangers: he has *three* walks on the *season*. (Byrd gave up three singles and a run in the eighth to finish his day.)

Now, I'm not saying that not walking people is a primary goal, or is even a major factor in Byrd's success. His worst two starts were walk-free, and his two-walk start against the White Sox came in six scoreless innings. But an absence of walks can only happen when a pitcher is being effective in the strike zone: by pounding the zone (63 strikes, 19 balls on Sunday), Byrd is getting ahead of hitters (only 5 of Byrd's 29 hitters started 1-0), inducing swings at hard-to-drive pitches (the Reds fouled off 15 pitches), and consistently getting into the late innings with low pitch counts (Byrd has three starts each of 6 and 7 innings and one of 6 2/3; he has topped 100 pitches only once). A lack of walks also means that Byrd, a high-contact pitcher, isn't hurt as badly by base hits, since he forces opponents to hit their way on.

Of course, that's why I consider an absence of walks to be an effect rather than a cause: none of this works if he doesn't do a decent job of

not getting smacked around. I am wary of giving too much credit to the new splitter since none of these numbers is out of line with Byrd's 21st-century performance, but this is the recipe for a successful year out of Paul Byrd.

2) My favorite player overcomes adversity with mediocre aplomb!

Cliff Lee's 2nd inning was not one for the ages, involving a hit batsman on a 3-2 count, two badly-played bunts (one deemed egregious enough to be an error), and a triple off the wall. In all, Lee gave up four runs (two earned) on two hits. Through two innings, Lee had given up four hits, a walk, and hit a batter, throwing 21 balls in 55 pitches: the 25 pitches he threw in the first was his more-efficient inning.

After the Indians scored six runs in the bottom of the frame, Lee decided to stop mucking about and faced the minimum through the next four innings. He actually gave up a single, a double, and a walk, but erased each baserunner with a double play (two groundouts, one Brandon Phillips Baserunning Moment). He faced fewer batters, threw fewer pitches, and had fewer balls out of the strike zone in those four innings than he had in the first two.

There's not really a Big Important Lesson to learn here except that Lee appears to like pitching with a lead. Sometimes, the best defense is to be opposing Kyle Lohse.

3) Now is the time on Sprockets when we suck

Jeremy Sowers is having a bit of a rough spot recently. After being skipped in the rotation with the whole Westbrook-Carmona timing shenanigan, Sowers showed no good effects from the layoff, picking up right where he left off, which was Suckville. Sowers allowed 7 runs in 6 innings, a minor improvement over the 6 runs in 5 innings he allowed in his previous start. (To be fair, both kicked major butt on the 6 runs in 2 innings he had allowed before that.) He still has a wrong-way K:BB ratio, and was victimized for a pair of three-run taters in Saturday's loss.

I have no actual insight here: right-handers are tattooing Sowers to the tune of a .352 batting average and .949 OPS. Unless something radical happens in the next

couple of weeks, you have to think that when Westbrook is ready to come off the DL, Sowers will head to Beefalo to work things out. There's something to be said for him needing to work things out against major-league hitters, but there's something to be said for the Indians winning ballgames, and at present, the two don't seem compatible.

4) The young and the defenseless

Two of the offensive heroes this weekend were shortstop Jhonny Peralta and first baseman Ryan Garko. Before the season started, there were serious questions about whether these two could play adequate defense, and less-serious-but-still-significant questions as to whether they could actually produce offensively as they had in the past (in Peralta's case, 2005; in Garko's case, was 2006 "for real" or a mirage).

Peralta had a terrific weekend, batting 6-for-12 with two home runs and a double. He had an extra-base hit in each of the three games and scored and drove in a run in

each game. He is hitting .328/.392/.642 in May, as well as .275/.358/.535 overall. The 83 points of OBP-AVG is impressive, as it suggests a good approach at the plate: Peralta also has 10 home runs (a number he did not accumulate until August last season) and 31 RBI, which is tied with Victor Martinez for the team lead. Peralta's power had disappeared last season, and since it was a significant portion of his value as a player (especially for a shortstop), his ability to regain some of that power was critical to his future success. One troubling feature of Peralta's hitting: he is hitting an unconscious .352 with a 1.166 OPS at home ... and .197 with a .617 OPS on the road.

Garko's weekend at the plate didn't exactly pale in comparison: 4-for-7 with a home run, two runs scored, and 3 RBI to extend his hitting streak to nine games. Five of those nine games featured multiple hits, and after a very sluggish start in the power department, Garko is hitting .328/.378/.526 on the season, buoyed by a .393/.424/.656 May. Garko's three-run homer in the bottom of the second Friday is credited with breaking the game open and getting Lee into a position to aggressively attack the Reds' hitter en route to the 9-4 win. (Garko was given Sunday off to get Hafner a game at first and Shoppach a day behind the plate.)

The fly in the ointment was illustrated by the fact that Garko's three-run blast was necessary to tie the game largely because Garko was unable to handle bunts in his direction. He certainly didn't make excuses and felt like he needed to redeem himself, but the fact remained that his play in the second inning of Friday's game bordered on Dick Stewart Butchery. To be fair, Garko has improved noticeably at first, especially in terms of getting into position to take a throw and fielding off-center tosses, but as everyone learns, there is more to first base than simply standing on the bag and holding out your arm. Although I think his improvement is enough to show that he should continue to play first as often as possible (because his positive bat greatly outweighs his subspectacular glove), it bears mentioning that he's not a finished product.

Which brings us to Peralta, whose bat is a distinct plus at shortstop, but his defense remains, well, adventurous. He's made 7 errors and sports a .958 fielding percentage, which seems poor. He has a 4.65 range factor and a .783 Zone Rating, statistics which illustrate just how little I understand about defensive statistics. These may be adequate. These may be preposterously bad. They might even be wrong. I don't even know how they're calculated. All I know is that Peralta looks better than he

did last year, but still doesn't look Actually Good. Can a team win with Peralta's defense at shortstop? In my opinion, it can, as long as it gets Peralta's current level of offense. I am willing to entertain the notion that a defensive upgrade is necessary, but I'll dig my heels in before "necessary" becomes "crucial."

5) How Not To Productions presents: Late-Inning Containment

If you've ever seen the movie "Men In Black," you might remember the small, pen-like device the agents used to erase a certain portion of a person's memory. This was handy in preventing people from learning the truth about extraterrestrials on Earth. It may also come in handy in making Ferd Cabrera into a useful player who does not frighten small children and dogs. (Cats do not care, and birds and fish have more reptilian brains, unable to understand the subtle nuances of relief pitching.)

In the early part of the season, Cabrera was completely unhittable, striking out a batter-and-a-half an inning and sporting a perfect 0.00 ERA. He was not just sliced bread, but self-buttering sliced bread.

Saturday, Ferd Cabrera was also completely unhittable, because he threw six strikes in nineteen pitches to walk the bases loaded before being pulled. Only one of the three subsequent runs was earned, thanks to butchery simple (a passed ball) and complex (Josh Barfield), but the fact remains that Cabrera has reached a Tipping Point in the young season in which I trust him to do nothing more complex than nap. Spitting sunflower seeds could be a real asphyxiation issue; shaving seems like a disaster waiting to happen.

I am a huge Ferd Fan, and really hope he turns it around, but there's something going on here, and I think it's unrelated to his arm.

6) I don't know what you were looking at, I find the emperor to be quite nattily dressed indeed

Grady Sizemore may, in fact, turn out to be okay.

After last weekend's series against Oakland, I wondered aloud about when Sizemore would be able to hit his way out of a slump that had dropped his average to .239 on the season. Although he did take an 0-for-4 collar on Thursday, in his other five games since then Sizemore has had a pair of 4-for-5 games and at least one hit in each. Friday, Sizemore clubbed his seventh home run to go with three singles, and singled ones on each of Saturday and Sunday. His average stands at .273 after the weekend series. Although he has only drawn one walk in his last ten games (and drawing 27 walks had been an important part of his development as a leadoff hitter), he has gotten on base in six of his last seven games and ranks 4th in the AL in runs scored, which is kind of the point of your leadoff hitter. He also ranks 1st in the AL with 15 stolen bases, but alas, was finally caught this weekend after stealing his first 15 without a blemish. (I believe a "red light" would be an overreaction, though.)

7) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.: Bullpen

Edition

Oldberto Hernandez is not even remotely fungal. In two hitless, walkless innings of work in support of Cliff Lee Friday, Hernandez struck out four of the seven batters he faced, **all four swinging**. (An error by Blake prevented the innings from being perfect.)

Aaron Fultz finished off Friday's win with a perfect 1-K inning. He also gave up a sacrifice fly to Ken Griffey, Jr. on Sunday with the bases loaded and no outs, setting the stage for future heroics.

Rafael Betancourt wisely allowed Kelly Shoppach to catch Ryan Freel stealing third, then struck out his batter for an efficient 2/3 of an inning in only 6 pitches (5 strikes).

Joe Borowski pitched a perfect ninth to save Sunday's 5-3 win, throwing 15 strikes in 21 pitches and striking out one batter.

Eddie Mujica threw two pointless but excellent innings Saturday, striking out three batters and walking one in two hitless innings of relief. He threw 19 strikes in 28 pitches, which is apparently a hallmark of Eddie Moo's stints in the minors, where he is known as a strike-throwing machine.

Tom Mastny forced the columnist to invoke the Thumper Rule. It is possible to throw 2/3 of a hitless inning and be charged with no runs without actually pitching effectively.

8) Nice hose!

Trot Nixon doubled Brandon Phillips off second base Friday.

Kelly Shoppach made an improbable throw in an effort to catch Ryan Freel stealing third: the throw went exactly to the point at which Freel was sliding instead of, say, to third baseman Casey Blake. Blake made a nice (if awkward) play to catch the ball, allowing Freel to ostensibly slide into his glove. I say ostensibly because the replay did not make it entirely clear that Freel actually touched Blake's glove. Jerry Narron certainly didn't think so. It was a heckuva throw, regardless.

9) For completeness' sake

Josh Barfield has a nice two-run double to fuel the win Sunday: he got at least one hit in each of the three games, stole two bases without being caught, and has raised his average to .225. He is hitting

.294/.314/.397 in May.

Andy Marte was called up. I thought I'd tell you because you may not have noticed, given his zero plate appearances. (This should not be construed as a complaint.)

10) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro rented a plane and seeded the clouds above the Cleveland airport with silver iodide and liquid nitrogen to make it snow on the Seattle Mariners' team plane just to make them think the makeup game Monday had been snowed out, too. You can't make it snow with silver iodide and liquid nitrogen in late May, even in Cleveland, so this is complete nonsense. Fire Eric Wedge.