Last night's game was a bit of a letdown coming off to the weekend sweep of Detroit, but The B-List still addresses it anyway. From Cliff Lee's ordinaritude to the umpires' quality, Buff looks at the 5-3 loss without using any of George Carlin's Seven Words, which, you'll have to admit, is pretty impressive. And man does Wedge look scary in that photo.

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (31-18)	0	0	0	0
Red Sox (35-15)	0	0	0	2

W: Schilling (5-2) L: C. Lee (2-2) S: Papelbon (13)

Given the matchup of starters, I was not overly confident, road sweep of the Tigers or no.

1) Qualifying success

Paul Byrd gave up 4 runs in 6 1/3 innings and was considered to have pitched another good game. C.C. Sabathia gave up three runs in 7 innings and earned his seventh win by "winning the head-to-head battle with Justin Verlander" (which he didn't, but hey). Fausto Carmona showed his continued development by giving up 3 runs in 7 innings to beat the high-octane Tigers.

Well, if these games were "good," then Cliff Lee had a pretty good outing against the Red Sox, a team with even more offense than the Tigers (in a much better offensive park). Lee gave up six hits in 5 innings, striking out 4 and walking 2 in a three-run effort that tagged him with his second loss of the season.

Lee wasn't exactly sharp (four of the six hits were for extra bases, including three doubles in the two-run 4th and a solo shot by Manny in the 5th), but he did throw strikes (66 in 97 pitches) and kept the Sox off balance for at least the first three innings. The Red Sox sport the same kind of patient offense the Indians have, so the fact that Lee was gone after five wasn't that surprising.

Still, if the bullpen does the kind of job it did in Detroit (where it allowed no runs in three games), Lee doesn't lose this game. I still think that part of the reason for the thirteen-man staff right now was to hedge our collective bets in case both Lee and Sowers turned into large orange squashes against the Red Sox, and although five innings is not a lot, it's a decent performance for a left-hander in Fenway against the AL's top team.

2) If a rule and a call are asinine, does the manager make a sound?

There is a rule in the official major league rulebook that states that if a batter swings at a pitch that hits him, it is a dead ball.

Now, I suppose the reason for this would be that a player who is swinging at a pitch may strike it in an unpredictable direction: say, straight back to the screen. If there were runners on base, they could take advantage of this by advancing on what amounts to a glorified foul ball, which they obviously can't advance on. But it still seems weird to me that Casey Blake can be hit on the hands with what looks very much like a foul ball and then BOTH be called out AND have the runners remain at second and third. I mean, you can either say he swung and he's out and now the catcher has to go get the ball OR he swung and struck the ball and gets another shot at it, wouldn't you think?

Regardless, that's the rule, and the umpires applied it properly.

That is, if they actually applied the proper rule. If Blake swung at that pitch, then ring-tailed lemurs pilot aircraft. He was hit in the hand. He no more swung the bat than shaved his beard. What a piffulous call.

So where was Eric Wedge? Bobby Cox has shown that it's okay to get tossed from a game now and then (I believe he's three short of the all-time record set by John McGraw back when managers were allowed to strike umpires with steel chairs like professional wrestlers). Isn't that call worth getting worked up about? I mean, I understand the school of thought that says that getting the intentional technical foul or making the futile argument is a waste of time and professional ath-a-letes don't need added motivation or inspiration, but great googly moogly, you've gotta go Sweet Lou every now and again, and getting Papelbon out of rhythm might have been nice on a night when Travis Hafner was swinging the bat like a porpoise.

3) The sub-triumphant return

Aaron Fultz threw a strike! Stop the presses!

Okay, so he subsequently walked J.D. Drew anyway, but it was a 3-2 count, and Drew can draw a walk. I can't get real worked up about that, especially seeing that he then got Mike Lowell to ground into a fielder's choice two pitches (both strikes) later. I'm still concerned that Fultz has something that's bothering him, but I'm no Will Carroll , and can't tell

you if he's changed his arm slot or velocity or anything that acts as a harbinger of pain. It's been noted that Fultz is working on correcting a "mechanical problem;" intuitively, the only way an oft-used reliever (Fultz has 24 appearances, including 10 in May) develops a "mechanical problem" is to have something feel differently than it did before (say, a shooting pain somewhere).

4) The sub-sub-triumphant return

Oldberto Hernandez was the first man out of the bullpen, and pitched mediocrely, giving up two hits in 1 2/3 innings, leaving to let Fultz face the left-handed Drew. However, one of the hits was an inside-the-park home run to noted speedster Kevin Youkilis, which admittedly was more a function of the strange geometry of Fenway Park's center field than it was any bad defense. Still, that was a very serious drive and would have been a Plain Old Home Run in a lot of other parks.

Mike Koplove continued to show why he continues to draw a major league paycheck, striking out two Red Sox hitters in one inning, but also showed why his paycheck is the major league minimum by giving up two hits and a walk on the way to a one-run 8th that stretched the lead back to three runs. Koplove seems to be a nice enough bullpen arm, but nothing more significant than a tenth or eleventh guy, the kind of reliever than gets left off the playoff roster. He's just this guy, you know? He also managed to give up two stolen bases: it may be that Victor Martinez was more to blame, but Martinez' previous 27% catch rate was good for third best in the majors (after eliminating pitchers' pickoffs, according to Peter Gammons' 5/28 blog entry), and Koplove's delivery is pretty involved: I'm more inclined to think it had more to do with the success than any other single factor.

5) That's a nice sombrero, may I interest you in a siesta?

Travis Hafner struck out four times last night, including for the final out of the game with runners on second and third. Curt Schilling recorded 10 strikeouts on the evening, apparently throwing an especially nasty splitter last night, but no other Cleveland hitter struck out more than twice. Hafner struck out against three different Boston pitchers, three times swinging, and left 6 men on base in all (not all at the ends of innings), including four in scoring position.

Hafner has never really been on track this season, and is now hitting .259/.414/.453. As recently as 5/22 he was hitting .281, so despite having a hit in seven of his last ten games, Hafner seems to be in a bit of a cold streak at the plate. Looking at the strikeouts, the swings look good, but extremely poorly timed. Look, it's not like Hafner is a complete putz or anything: in those ten games, he's also drawn seven walks, and two of the hits were home runs. I'm wondering aloud, though, if Hafner couldn't use a couple days off, just to clear his head, or work on his swing, or maybe stop striking out with runners in scoring position. Call it a "strategy."

6) Welcome back

Trot Nixon celebrated his return to Boston by going 1-for-3 and driving in a run on a sacrifice fly to center against lefty J.C. Romero. He was treated warmly by the home crowd, which probably found it easier to cheer after the first three Indians had struck out swinging and Victor Martinez grounded out on the first pitch he saw. (Actually, against a guy with a tough splitter like Schilling, I'm okay with swinging at straighter stuff earlier in the count, as long as you're an experienced proven hitter like Victor. Gotta be easier to hit a 0-0 fastball than a 1-2 splitter.)

I gotta question why Nixon is batting against Romero, though: he has a serious platoon split (hitting .231 with a .597 OPS against lefties, which is dreadful), and you could easily see Jason Michaels sliding into that slot (I don't know if either Dellucci or Michaels is a good right fielder, but surely they're not both completely atrocious). Michaels hits lefties better, but just as significant, would hit a righty better than Nixon hits lefties even if they swapped out. The followup hitter, Jhonny Peralta, got the righty anyway, so it wasn't a matter of "saving" a spot. Hey, Nixon drove in a run, so it's not like he was a complete failure, but Michaels has actually approximated "hot", his 0-for-3 collar Sunday notwithstanding.

7) Box score follies

Player 1 leads the Red Sox with a .354 batting average, while Player 2 is second at .328. Together they combine for 16 HR, 67 RBI, and 202 total bases.

Obviously, David Ortiz figures in here: Ortiz has 9 homers and 102 total bases with 38 RBI. And Manny Ramirez is a heckuva hitter. Except that Ortiz is hitting .316, and Manny isn't. Ortiz and Ramirez combine for 17 HR, 186 total bases, and 69 RBI.

Players 1 and 2 are Kevin Youkilis and ... MIKE LOWELL. Mike Freaking Lowell, the guy the Sox HAD to accept and pay in order to get Josh Beckett. The guy who was so washed up they accidentally put "Cirillo" on his jersey. Mike Lowell! He has 13 doubles! Good grief! Next thing you'll be telling me that Casey Blake has even more than that.

(I saw this on Baseball Tonight Sunday, but went to check it again since Youkilis hit the ersatz homer.)

By the way, Alex Cora is hitting .319/367/.514. Yes, THAT Alex Cora. The Red Sox have stolen 31 bases ... and been caught 5 times.

8) For completeness' sake

Jhonny Peralta stole his second base of the season. This makes me nervous: I don't trust Peralta to make sound baserunning decisions. However, it was on a 3-2 count, so I believe it's not a case of Peralta having a green light or anything.

9) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro has been giving free piloting lessons to ring-tailed lemurs. I don't think he is licensed to do this, so it is very unlikely to be true. Fire Eric Wedge.