This just in. The Red Sox are good. Any team that can throw Curt Schilling, Josh Beckett, and Daisuke Matsuzaka at you in a three game set, and close you out with in back to back nights with both ends of a two headed closer ... that team just may still be playing in late October. In today's B-List, Buff analyzes yesterday's 4-2 loss to the Bosox using several words that I don't know the meaning of.

| FINAL SCORE | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Indians (31-18)** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Red Sox (35-15)** | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

*W: Beckett (8-0)□□ L: Sowers (1-5)□□ S: Okajima (4)*

Did I mention the lack of confidence I had given the matchup of starters in the given venue Monday? That went about eighty-fold for Tuesday's tilt. I was wrong ... but I was right.

**1) On the comeback trail**

Jeremy Sowers' last start against Kansas City (5/24) was a good one, which was a welcome sight after three putrid ones in a row. Even after giving up one run in seven innings, Sowers' ERA was an unsightly 6.29: facing the Red Sox in Fenway is probably not the best recipe for making that number shrink.

And it didn't, actually: it turns out that giving up 4 runs in 5 2/3 innings gives you a 6.35 ERA, so it looks like more of the same, but it didn't really FEEL like more of

the same. In fact, after a stressful first inning in which three of the first four batters reached and Sowers was already down 1-0 with a runner in scoring position, Sowers retired the next 11 hitters in order to get through four innings down 1-0. Josh Beckett, who faced the minimum through six innings, gave up more baserunners in the second through fourth inning (one) than Sowers (zero). After that, it was a solo shot in the fifth, another in the sixth, and a runner left on second for Ferd Cabrera to let in that added up to the four runs. After being taterrific in a four-game stretch last season, Sowers really hasn't been that homer-prone, so this is more likely an unfortunate intersection of opponent, time, and stadium: in all, Sowers went 5 2/3 with six hits, one (intentional) walk (of Manny, prob'ly a good idea), and one K. Sowers induced an uncharacteristic 11 ground ball outs to only 5 flies: I don't know if this represents a real change in approach, since three other fly balls were not caught by virtue of being well over outfielders' collective heads, but it would be nice if it did.

I am far from being able to declare that Sowers has pitched his way back into my heart (or, in fact, back into a permanent rotation slot when Westbrook returns), but the K.C. game was good, and this one had enough encouraging things that I feel less like mentally tallying a given loss when I see his name in the list of starters for the day.

**2) Managerial Back-Patters**

Sometimes Eric Wedge will make a decision that defies my understanding. A major league manager has to be able to do certain things by "feel," and that includes handling the pitching staff. He can't be too rigid ("Three run lead with one out in 6th inning, bring in Pitcher B-6, whirr, beep") but has to give players enough role definition so that they feel comfortable and confident to do their jobs well. Sometimes you go with the hot hand. Sometimes you go with a matchup suggested by the numbers ("This guy is 1-for-13 with 7 Ks against Lenny, let's bring him in"). Ozzie Guillen has been masterful at this. Ron Gardenhire and Jim Leyland are pretty good at it, although each makes some strange decisions now and again.

A lot of Eric Wedge's "goodness" or "badness" is defined by the quality of the pitchers in the bullpen: when Bob Howry was excellent, and Wedge brough Howry in, and Howry pitched excellently, it looked pretty masterful of Wedge to have brought him in. When the bullpen consisted of Danny Graves and Scott Sauerbeck, Wedge didn't look quite as smart. Now, I maintain that Wedge exacerbated his own problems last season, but it's worth noting that many bullpen failures can be better-explained by a failure of the bullpen than by any arcane science applied by the manager.

This team is a better team if Fernando Cabrera is pitching well. That's because when Ferd is pitching well, he pitches really, *really* well. Like, "Why are you holding that bat, you aren't going to be needing it" well. Zero point zero well. Joel Zumaya well. He can look That Good. Of course, when Ferd is pitching poorly, you might as well simply immolate him Buddhist monk style and be done with it. Bringing in Cabrera under those circumstances is no better than throwing underhand. The trick, obviously, is to figure out a way to keep Bad Ferd in the bullpen and let Good Ferd pitch from the Production Mound.

With two outs in the sixth inning, Sowers gave up a double and Wedge summoned Some Ferd to the mound. Cabrera responded by walking the first batter on four pitches.

Here is what Eric Wedge did: nothing. He all but told Cabrera, "I have thrown you in the pool, I sure hope you make it to the side." It was as if the conversation went as follows:

***Ferd**: I cannot throw a strike, I have walked the man on four pitches. Will I be removed like Aaron Fultz for my failure?*
***Wedge**: No. This is your situation. You must get out of it.*
***Ferd**: I threw a strike, then walked the man on four more pitches. Now the bases are loaded.*
***Wedge**: Only you can help you. This is your doing, you fix it.*
***Ferd**: Damn, I have walked in a run. I have failed.*
***Wedge**: You have not failed until you give up. You are the man. Be the man.*
***Ferd**: Hot damn, I struck him out with the bases loaded!*

Now, am I going to tell you that because of this outing, Ferd Cabrera is Back And Better Than Ever, Guaranteed, You Bet Your Bippy? Of course not. The man threw seven strikes in 22 pitches and walked in a run. That's pretty crappy. And striking out one guy isn't going to put him on the Straight and Narrow and more than throwing one excellent slider or hitting 100 with one pitch. It's one guy. But I can't help thinking: Wedge could have pulled the guy in disgust after the first couple of walks and said whatever he wanted with his *mouth*: his *action* would have said, "You are dead to me, Fredo." If this helps get Cabrera on the path to being a real resource, it's easily worth giving up one run in a May road game.

**3) Welcome back to the bigs!**

Rafael Perez can throw strikes. He can also rot on the bench. These are the two things Perez did most often last season in a brief stint with the Indians: Perez was tied with Tom Mastny for Most Inexplicable Non-Use Situations for a while. Perez actually started out pitching Some Kind Of Ridiculous with six consecutive scoreless outings and a

K/9 of 14.3. As with all relief pitchers, a couple multi-run sub-inning outings killed his ERA, which ballooned to 5.06 before ending at 4.38, but ERA for relief pitchers who throw 12 innings total isn't going to be the best measure in the world. Perez could also comfortably pack about ninety cheesburgers worth of postgame meals on his body and still look thin, but that's neither here nor there.

Perez struck out three batters in two scoreless innings, all swinging, all right-handed. He gave up one double to Manny, walked no one, and generally looked like he should have been in the bullpen all along. I fully expect to see him head to Beefalo real soon, but it won't be because the best possible 11 or 12 pitchers are on the Cleveland roster. This might be a good time to shop Mike Koplove or the Oldinator.

**4) A bright spot in the void**

Jhonny Peralta was moved up into the 2-hole as Casey Blake was given the night (mostly) off. Peralta responded by getting on base 3 of the 4 times he went to the plate, hitting a pair of singles and drawing a walk. He scored Cleveland's first run on Hafner's subsequent triple (yes, another one) and was one of the minority of Cleveland starters not to strike out.

Peralta is now hitting .290 on the season: I'm not sure if this is sustainable, as I'd tempered by expectations for Peralta after last season to sort of "split the difference" between his brilliant 2005 and his dismal 2006. I pegged him as being around a .275 hitter

with some pop, so .290 wouldn't be out of the question, but it also wouldn't surprise me if he fell back a little. Both of Peralta's singles were to right field, which is a good sign for Jhonny: almost everyone is a better hitter when he uses the entire field, but this seems especially true for Peralta, who can get into ruts of trying to guess-pull fastballs. He's also walked 21 times compared to 40 strikeouts, a significantly better ratio than his career mark and super-extra-triple much better than last year's near 3-to-1 mark. In fact, Peralta's aforementioned 2005 season numbers were .292/.366/.520; this season he is hitting .290/.363/.506. (By the way, I mentioned his stolen base yesterday: that gives him a career-high **TWO** on the season, marking the first time since **2003** that he had successfully stolen one. So, yeah, he probably doesn't exactly have a Green Light.)

## 5) A void spot in the bright, or Son of Return of Terror on the Basepaths

Before we get too carried away praising Jhonny Peralta, note that after his first-inning single, he was doubled off first when Travis Hafner flew out to center. Note also that if you are on first base, you normally run toward second base, and that center field is behind second base. This means that to be doubled off first on a fly to center, you have to be running toward the man who is catching the ball, which is something that is rarely considered Good Strategy or Old Skool Baseball or Not Meatheaded.

## 6) Living the charmed life

Casey Blake got the night off, leaving Mike Rouse to face a dominant Josh Beckett. Rouse had a plate appearance in which he did not strike out, which is about as much positive spin as one can put on it. After Beckett left, Blake was summoned to pinch-hit, and promptly singled for one of the four Cleveland hits in the game. So not only is Blake having an extended hot streak with the bat, he also gets to avoid Josh Beckett. There is no word as to whether Rouse is answering to the new nickname "Human Shield."

## 7) Managerial Head-Scratchers

Monday, Trot Nixon was allowed to stay in the game to face the left-handed relief pitcher despite having terrible platoon splits and Jason Michaels being available on the bench. He lifted a sacrifice fly to center, but it's not entirely clear what the thinking there was.

So it is actually twice as unclear after it happened a second time last night, as Nixon struck out swinging against left-hander Hideki Okajima with Travis Hafner in scoring position to end the game. My best guess is that neither of the Michaels/Dellucci platoon can actually play right field to Eric Wedge's satisfaction (and Blake had already replaced Rouse at third, so wasn't an option). In this case, this becomes "General Manager Head-Scratchers," as a roster with 13 pitchers and 1 right fielder is probably not optimally constructed.

## 8) Reader Shout Out!

Yesterday's disturbing photo of Eric Wedge doing his David Aardsma impression came courtesy of frequent reader Jason Laurianti. Thanks, Jason, although somewhere out there is a frightened child who did not get adequate sleep last night.

## 9) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro puts heavily-stapled laminated paper in his recycling bins. In my neighborhood, this would result in a lawn strewn with heavily-stapled laminated paper, so this is quite unlikely. Fire Eric Wedge.