Dice K, Schmice K. The Tribe tatooed all nine of this goof's pitches last night, chasing him during a big 6th inning en route to a much needed 8-4 win as we head back home for four with the Motor City Kitties. In today's B-List, Buff talks about the balanced Indian offensive attack as well as The Revenge of the Son of Return of Terror on the Basepaths and his Managerial Head Scratchers of the game. And who was that guy starting last night for us? And what has he done with Paul Byrd?!?!

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (32-19)	0	0	0	0
Red Sox (36-16)	0	1	0	1

W: Byrd (6-1) L: Matsuzaka (7-3)

It was an interesting contrast last night: Daisuke Matsuzaka has nine pitches, and Paul Byrd has none.

1) The power of disbelief

Long ago, I enjoyed playing role-playing games, which that long ago pretty much meant Dungeons & Dragons ™. In D&D, one of the valuable spells one can cast is one that creates an illusion, so you can make it look like a big dragon is coming and all the orcs will run away because they're stupid. If the enemy is smarter, you can adjust the illusion to include smells and sounds, or make it something much scarier like an IRS Agent or a Care Bear. There isn't really a good way to protect

yourself from an illusion: in order to avoid taking real damage from the phantasm, you had to "disbelieve" it. This involved some sort of dice roll, but the premise was that you had to realize it was an illusion and it couldn't hurt you. This usually degenerated into trying to disbelieve every enemy in sight, but like the IRS or Care Bears, real enemies never went away and always caused pain, or at least nausea.

I think this is the secret to Paul Byrd's success as a starting pitcher: the opposing team says, "He can't possibly be throwing an 84-mph fastball through the strike zone to me, there must be a trick." They spend the first two or three times in the order thinking that the ball will move at the last second or twist or fade or do something other than drip gravy, but it never does, and by the time they realize this, Byrd is pitching in the 7th inning and they're already behind. Once they finally overcome their disbelief, it turns out that Paul Byrd is a middle-aged guy throwing inconceivable gunk and he leaves the game, probably to a guy who looks like Steve Dalkowski at that point in comparison to Byrd.

Now, this is a bit light-hearted: Byrd can generate some movement, both with the Improved Hockey Puck Curve and the New Splitter, and he does all the changing-speeds-hitting-spots things a successful control pitcher does. Through six (darned good) innings of work, Byrd threw 55 strikes in 71 pitches, giving up 6 hits and 2 runs (1 earned) with one strikeout. He extended his streak without walking a batter to sixteen years.

71 pitches is not a lot, and I hardly think Paul Byrd was "tired" at that point, but I think Jason Varitek was

able to disbelieve Byrd's illusory mastery to pull a single to right. Alex Cora and Dustin Pedroia followed with singles of their own, and Byrd's night was finished. It wasn't like any of the singles was a rocket shot: Pedroia's in particular looked like it was a double-play ball except through the hole. But that was certainly enough of that.

Still, it's hard to consider the start anything but a rousing success: through six innings, Byrd largely throttled the vaunted Boston attack and kept the Indians in the game until they could wear down Matsuzaka. You could win a bunch of games with 6 innings from your starter like that.

2) Hey, I've seen that before!

In the seventh inning, Boston was behind 6-2, but had just loaded the bases with no one out. Tom Mastny was summoned from the ‘pen to face Covelli Crisp. This was probably done for two reasons:

a) Mastny throws strikes
b) Mastny whiffs a guy an inning

You certainly don't want to Fultz a guy with the bases loaded, and a strikeout is the best kind of out in that situation because no one scores.

Naturally, Mastny immediately goes 2-0 on Crisp.

Now, this is pretty notable, because Mastny usually pounds the zone exclusively: he's not quite Raffy Betancourt, but he's pretty accurate. Fortunately, his next pitch was a strike and Crisp lofted a foul ball that Casey Blake made an excellent play to catch, falling into his own dugout.

(As an aside, how is Jason Varitek not tagging up on that? He looked like the thought hadn't even occured to him.) Then Mastny whiffed Kevin Youkilis, making him look bad on a fastball away when he was apparently looking for Mastny's (admittedly-brutal) curve.

I'll get more into what happened next later, but the bottom line is that after Aaron Fultz got David Ortiz, it completed a sequence in which "bases loaded no outs" turned into "zero runs three outs." I thought we had a monopoly on that, but maybe it was just a one-month (April) lease.

3) Managerial Head-Scratchers

On one level (the stupid one), I can see the rationale behind bringing in Aaron Fultz to face David Ortiz. Fultz is left-handed and Ortiz has a platoon split. And bringing in Fultz with the bases loaded is kind of like what I was saying before about giving Ferd a chance to work through things: Fultz had been so bad recently with the bases loaded that Wedge may have thought that bringing him in would show confidence and recenter him and whatever other rationalization you want to come up with.

It was hogwash, whatever the thinking.

Look, Mastny was obviously pitching well, and doesn't have a platoon split to speak of. He gets guys out, and if there was a hotter hitter inside the Asteroid Belt than Kevin Youkilis, I'm not aware of him. Besides, if Ortiz did get on base, Manny is next, so you'd end up burning through a pair of relievers. Fultz, on the other hand, was coming off brutal outings, had already made 24 appearances on the season, and isn't really a lefty-matchup guy (he's actually been better against right-handers this season, but the samples are tiny). Shoot, if you wanted to bring in a lefty, how about Raffy Perez, who looked pretty evil the night before?

I will give Fultz credit: he got lucky that one bad pitch (the announcers called it a hanging curve, but I saw no movement and thought it looked more like a straight change, albeit a terribly-located one) was pulled foul, but he got Ortiz in a 9-pitch (7 strikes) at-bat that had Paul Byrd rejoicing and turned Fenway into Field of Newts. (By the way, Fultz did have a couple bad outings, but his season stats are really tremendous, with a .125 AVG against, WHIP of 0.91, and ERA of 1.88.)

4) Everybody hits!

Oh, yeah, I know where I got that idea that the Indians can be lame with the bases loaded: from the first inning! The Indians stranded runners in scoring position in three of the first four innings before finally breaking through in the fifth on an RBI groundout by Blake and a run-scoring double by Travis Hafner. Hafner went 3-for-5 with a pair of RBI (1 each on each of the two doubles he hit to the opposite field), showing that calling for a night off was obviously (but not unexpectedly) complete nonsense on my part. But every Cleveland hitter got a hit: six of the nine batters had multiple hits, and six players had at least one extra-base hit.

A few players deserve special mention: Grady Sizemore ended Matsuzaka's night with a two-run homer to right the snuck over the wall (but was hit well, certainly). Sizemore also doubled,

giving him 9 doubles and 9 homers on the season to go with his 17th stolen base; he also scored three times. David Dellucci had a pair of hits, including a nice piece of hitting to pop a double off the Monster in the sixth to score Trot Nixon. That's one of the things about watching a game in Fenway: I figured that was a nice sacrifice fly, and it just kept going until it hit (pretty high up) the wall. (In contrast, Jhonny Peralta hit a 400-plus-foot out to deepest center that I thought was obviously gone until it wasn't.) Josh Barfield and Ryan Garko also had a pair of hits.

But the offensive gold star on the night goes to #9 hitter and Paul Byrd's Personal Catcher, Kelly Shoppach, who went 4-for-5 on the night with a solo shot over the Monster and three runs scored. Shoppach is now hitting .373 on the season (admittedly with a smallish number of plate appearances) and sports an OPS over 1.000. (Actually, I don't know for sure that Shoppach is Byrd's Personal Catcher, but to paraphrase Crash Davis, "Don't @#%*ing change it **now**.")

The offensive dunce cap goes to Trot Nixon, who grounded into a double play with the bases loaded and left 6 men on base: no other Indian left more than 3.

5) The Revenge of the Son of Return of Terror on the Basepaths

Josh Barfield stroked an 0-2 pitch from Matsuzaka for an RBI single in the 4-run 6th. That's good hitting. Kelly Shoppach then singled to left, where Manny Ramirez usually plays an amusing left field wearing pajamas. Barfield took a big turn at second ...

... and was caught by Manny's good throw to second. I know Manny is goofy and lumbering and looks silly wearing pajamas in left field, but the man is a heckuva athlete and can throw the ball. Where are you going, anyway? Manny could roll it to third and beat you there.

Now, I should note that Barfield was not actually tagged out. It was a bad call, and the umpire got it wrong. But the throw beat Barfield to the bag, and you're going to get called out on that one (see also "tagging out basestealers"). More

importantly, there's simply no reason to be in that position.

Oh, by the way, Sizemore homered two pitches later.

6) A contrast in styles

Granted a 6-run lead after the Tribe tacked on two more runs in the top of the 8th, Oldberto Hernandez came out an promptly walked Manny, induced a groundout, and gave up a two-run shot to Mike Lowell. He went 2-1 on each of the next two hitters, although admittedly each popped out to the infield. In all, Hernandez threw 11 strikes in 23 pitches and gave up two runs.

Rafael Betancourt threw 13 pitches, 11 for

strikes, and induced two groundouts before whiffing Youkilis to end the game after a perfect ninth.

Now, this galls me: I understand bringing in Mastny in the 7th with the bases loaded: it was a 4-run lead and you have to get out of that without giving up the lead. But to use all of Mastny, Fultz, and Betancourt in an 8-4 win right before facing Detroit just chaps me. Couldn't Koplove have eaten that last inning? Or Perez? Bleah.

Anyway, the pitcher who threw strikes and kept the ball down was more successful than the blunderbuss up in the zone. Who could POSSIBLY have predicted THAT?!

7) Worth noting

In addition to Sizemore's 17th steal, Josh Barfield stole second for his 6th on the season. The Indians have stolen 31 bases on the season and have been caught 10 times; opponents are 36-for-48 for nearly the identical success percentage, but also nearly the same raw frequency. This is a pretty stark contrast from 2006, when Cleveland stole 55 and was caught 23 times, while opponents went a sickening 128-for-162 against Cleveland catchers. In 2005 Cleveland had an atrocious 62:36 ratio, while opponents stole to the tune of 103:33.

It's encouraging to see that we're using the weapon successfully and more often: opponents are on roughly the same pace as 2005 (114:38) instead of 2006.

8) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro sells caffeine to unsuspecting Mormon schoolchildren. I don't believe there ARE unsuspecting Mormon schoolchildren, but even if there were, this statement would still be false. Fire Eric Wedge.