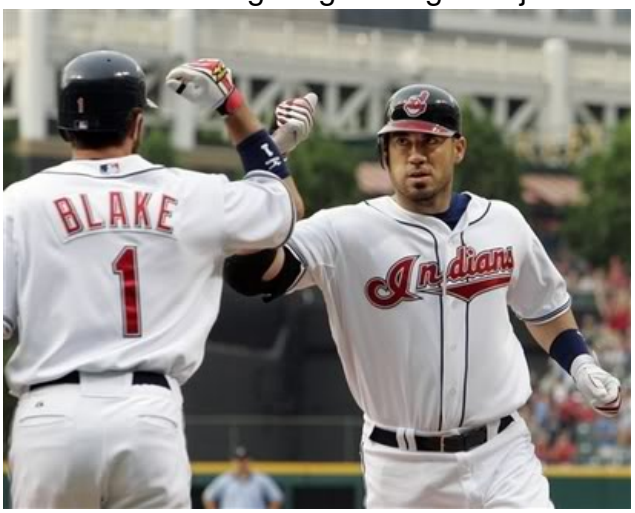
Lost in the shadows of last night's thrilling 2OT Cavs win was the fact that the Indians beat the Tigers AGAIN, and now have a 3.5 game lead over them in the AL Central. The Tribe once again had a balanced offensive attack, shelling young phenom Justin Verlander and aging blunderbuss Jose Mesa. Pronk stayed hot, and C.C. won his eighth game against just one loss. And Buff tells us all about it in today's B-List.



FINAL SCORE				
Tigers (30-23)	0	1	3	0
Indians (33-19)	2	0	0	0

W: Sabathia (8-1) L: Verlander (5-2)

I went to bed after the game. I mean, was there a reason to stay up after you knew Cleveland had beaten Detroit ... in baseball?

1) Ninety percent of success is showing up when Travis Hafner is hot

C.C. Sabathia won his eighth game of the season last night, tying him for the AL lead.

He also pitched like a schmoe.

Okay, that's not entirely fair: schmoes get knocked out in the Westbrook after giving up more runs than outs. But this certainly wasn't the best start Sabathia's

had this season, giving up 10 hits (including three doubles and a homer, one of the doubles to left-handed Sean Casey pinch-hitting for the ejected Gary Sheffield) and a walk to add up to five runs allowed. Sabathia kept the ball in the strike zone (68:36), but only struck out 2 batters.

Now, the two batters were well-placed: in the three-run third inning, Sabathia's contractually-obligated One Shitty Inning Per Start, he gave up a run-scoring single to Marcus Thames for the third run, then struck out Craig Monroe and Omar Infante swinging; Thames had stolen second during Infante's at-bat, so Sabathia stranded the potential fourth run of the inning in scoring position. And as per the aforementioned contract, Sabathia turned off the reptilian part of his brain he'd been using to pitch in the third and cruised through the next four innings allowing only one baserunner (on a walk): the 4th, 5th, and 6th were all 1-2-3 frames. (Or perhaps he turned off the wrinkly part of his cortex and used *only* his reptilian brain, I don't know.)

I give Sabathia plenty of credit for pitching this way: four consecutive hitless innings is nothing to sneeze at, and it kept the Tigers at bay until the Tribe could take the lead. Once we had the lead, Sabathia was instrumental in throttling any resistance (until the 8th, when Casey's double and a Thames single ended Sabathia's night). But take a look back to the "disappointing" starts of Jeremy Sowers and Cliff Lee against Boston: you can argue about how much more valuable it was to get to the 8th than having to leave after the 5th, but these are functionally-equivalent starts. Had this start been submitted by Sowers, I would be waxing poetic about how two strikeouts is lame and 10 hits shows his hittability and questioning whether this is as good as it gets.

Of course, this is the value of "track record:" Sabathia has had many, many better starts over his career, and Sowers has not. Sabathia had an early-season stretch of 5 outings of 8 or more strikeouts, and Sowers did not. Sabathia throws hard and is very large, and Sowers looks twelve years old. But after opening the season with those high-K outings (admittedly against lesser offenses: Chicago, Tampa, Texas, Toronto, and Bal'mer), Sabathia has struck out 5, 5, 4, 6, and 2. His control has been terrific, and his K:BB ratio is a sick 75:14 on the season: he is still averaging almost a K an inning (75 in 81), and has one start in twelve in which he didn't complete a sixth inning of work. But that really wasn't a very good start.

2) Pronk smash!

Ahem ahem ahem ...

Travis Hafner is a clod who offends the cosmos with his use of oxygen! He cannot hit his way out of a paper bag! He swings the bat like a cigar store Indian and reminds me of Stein from "Bad News Bears!" Are we sure he's really left-handed?!

Thank you.

(Okay, is the universe looking the other way again?)

Since his 4-K 0-for-5 outing Monday, all Hafner is done is go 1-for-3 with an RBI triple and a walk, got 3-for-5 with a pair of RBI doubles, and follow that up with a 2-for-3 night with a 2-run homer, a pair of walks, and 4 RBI. Hafner's blast in the first inning was not so unusual, except that it's only his third in his last 22 games, which IS unusual for Hafner. Hafner still leads the league with 47 walks (and has more walks than strikeouts), but his SLG is an uncharacteristically-low .497. (Yes, I just complained about a hitter slugging .497. But this is not "a hitter," this is Travis @#%*ing Hafner, fer crine out loud.)

Anyway, his home run (and not a cheap shot, but over 400 feet) seemed to buoy the Indians spiritually: even though they didn't take advantage right away, they did seem relaxed and confident at the plate, and eventually broke through to club Justin Verlander like something politically inappropriate.

3) We're out of trapezes, please redirect all daring young men to the warning track

People love watching Grady Sizemore play. Whether it's because of his hustle and effort or playing the "right

way" or his obvious skill or you're a straight woman or gay man, it takes a pretty hard-core Indians-hater not to appreciate Grady Sizemore.

However, I have a simple request.

Please do not dive headfirst running full speed into a stationary object like a wall.

Obviously, Sizemore did no such thing, or he'd be wearing a halo of one kind (to stabilize his broken neck) or another (to compliment his harp and wings). But he did run back on Curtis Granderson's drive in the second and, after a glance over his shoulder, laid out horizontally to catch the ball while landing on the warning track. Sizemore has much better depth perception than I do and likely knew exactly how much room he had. It was a wonderful catch, and I hope he never, ever, *ever* does it again. (He's going to: this wasn't even the first time he has ... but it still makes me nervous after the initial wave of wow-excitement ebbs.)

By the way, Sizemore also went 2-for-4 with a walk and a HBP, scoring twice and driving in two runs with his second triple of the season. Sizemore now has as many triples as Travis

Hafner, which is a pretty flabbergasting thought.

4) Everybody hits!

Some more than others, of course, and truthfully, Josh Barfield did not get a hit in 5 plate appearances (but he did drive in a run and scored one, too). But the Indians' attack was more than just Hafner being large and Sizemore being fast. Casey Blake chipped in a pair of hits and runs and was standing on base when Hafner's blast in the first cleared the wall. Victor Martinez hit a two-run homer off Verlander and drove in another with a sacrifice fly. And Jhonny Peralta and Ryan Garko each collected a pair of singles: Peralta also walked and scored, while Garko drove in a run.

The Indians did leave 12 runners on base, including a mind-boggling EIGHT in scoring position, but they did have 13 hits, 6 walks, 3 batters hit by Verlander, and an error by reliever Tim Byrdak, who is like Paul Byrd but with an "ack." (Byrdak actually pitched well, but walked two more hitters in his two innings of work than Byrd has in his past 40-plus.) I suppose that noting that Verlander gave up 7 runs in 5 innings suggests a certain lack of sharpness, but really, doesn't hitting three guys pretty much tell you that by itself? If not, perhaps the two wild pitches might help get the point across.

5) Hey, we had one of those!

Ex-Tribesman Jose Mesa is still in the bigs, pitching relief for Detroit this season. This is very good news for Mesa, who still collects a major-league paycheck. This is very, *very* good news for Cleveland, because Jose Mesa is really terrible. For Detroit, eh, not so good.

Mesa gave up four runs in his inning of work, yielding four hits and a walk. He sports a 12.34 ERA.

Hey, wait a minute, we still do have one of those! We just call ours "Oldberto."

6) Welcome back!

Franklin Gutierrez was called up when Mike Koplove was sent down. This gave us a more-sane 12-man staff and adds a right-handed hitting option to the outfield. Gutierrez usually gets called up, plays no innings, swings no bats, and heads back to Beefalo to compare notes with Eddie Moo.

However, Gutierrez actually got to play last night, albeit as a pinch-runner, so he's still swung nary a bat. He did score a run, though. And it's not like there was a part of the game where a left-handed reliever was facing left-handed hitting outf...

7) Managerial Head-Scratchers

... wait a minute, there was TOTALLY a part of the game where left-handed Tim Byrdak relieved Verlander in the sixth inning. With the bases loaded, he walked Hafner to force in a run, then gave up a sac fly to Martinez. Up trots Trot Nixon with runners on first and second ...

... and he promptly strikes out. Oh, well, we lead 7-4, maybe F-Goot is Too Scary to give a shot there.

So Byrdak walks Peralta to load the bases, and up trots David Dellucci ...

... who promptly strikes out.

Now, there's a nice piece of speculation on the message boards that Wedge may have left the two lefties in to force Byrdak to stay in the game and get used up. And, certainly, Byrdak did throw a lot of pitches (42 in all). And obviously we won the game, so no harm, no foul.

But Great Scott, our left-handed outfielders really can't hit left-handed pitching.

8) Ho Hum Dept.

Rafael Betancourt threw six pitches. All six were strikes. (He retired the two batters he faced.)

Rafael Perez threw 8 strikes in 12 pitches in a perfect ninth with 1 K.

Mike Rouse is learning the Alvaro Espinoza Commemorative Bubble Hat.

9) Completely False Statement for the Google Search

Engine

Mark Shapiro has shaved his head except for a small patch of hair at the base of his skull in honor of the Cavs' fine performance, and is insisting that people call him "Drew." At last report, Shapiro had not actually done this, but it is still an amusing thought. Fire Eric Wedge.