Think about it for a second. The Indians are on pace for over 100 wins. Grady Sizemore is on pace for over 50 steals. Fausto Carmona is 7-1. And Casey Blake just may be going to the All-Star game as ARod's backup at third base. Raise your hand if you predicted that a couple months ago. Buff hits on all of these items, as well as yesterday's 8-3 win over the Royals in today's B-List.

FINAL SCORE				
Royals (22-39)	0	0	0	0
Indians (36-22)	0	0	0	2

W: Carmona (7-1) L: O. Perez (3-6)

The Indians are starting to become like an NBA team: all the important scoring is done in a flurry the last quarter.

1) The lawnmower adds an attachment

Fausto Carmona pitched a fine game yesterday, finishing 7 full innings yielding 1 run on 7 hits and a walk. He gave up a pair of extra-base hits to Alex Gordon, and the second resulted in the only run in the 7th inning. Carmona finished right at 100 pitches, 64 for strikes (a pretty average number). He did throw a wild pitch, but it had no real effect on the game.

What was more striking to me was that through five innings Carmona

had amassed five strikeouts, four of them swinging. In the remaining two innings, five of the six outs were groundouts: before, that, Carmona's ratio was an unusual 6:4 GB:FB (but with 5 Ks).

None of these numbers is large enough to mean very much or predict a lot about the future: part of the reason he got to 100 pitches through 7 innings was the strikeouts. However, indulge me a bit here: let's split the game into two pieces:

Innings 1-5: 6 GB, 4 FB, 5 K, 3 H (1 XB), 1 BB, 0 R
Innings 6-7: 5 GB, 1 FB, 0 K, 4 H (1 XB), 0 BB, 1 R

In a sense, the "ground ball inducement" plan was a lot less successful than the "thorough mix" plan that included the strikeouts. There was a stretch last season in which Carmona had a K-rate that was out of whack with his previous rates in the minors, which was part of the reason he got a look at closer, in my opinion. There's no dispute that Carmona's sinker is a very good pitch, and I am a big fan of ground ball pitchers, but it may be that Carmona's continued evolution as a pitcher (and make no mistake: he's still a naif at this point) will be more successful on the Kevin Brown Path than the Chien-Ming Wang Path. I'm not so much suggesting that Carmona try to be a strikeout pitcher (which seems like a bad approach), but rather that Victor Martinez might consider calling the game more like the first five than having him pound the zone with the sinker. (I am not sophisticated enough to tell you how many of what pitches Carmona threw.)

Of course, he may have gotten tired or the Royals may have seen enough of him the third time through. Occam had a point.

2) A contrast in styles

"Today wasn't my best day, but when I left in the sixth we were still in the game," he said. "It wasn't a bad outing, but I am the loser, I gave up the three runs." - Odalis Perez

"The fact we came so close at the end makes me re-think everything I did. This one is my fault. This one is on me." - Paul Byrd

Now, in the past, I've poked Byrd a bit for seeming a bit too willing to assume the responsibility for a loss. There were a couple times last season when he did make a significant contribution to a losing effort, but was by no means the only problem. Wednesday's game, too, provided this sort of opportunity: Byrd could certainly have pitched better (notably to Ryan Shealy), but amongst Peralta's insouciant flip, Eric Wedge's baserunning management, and hitting with the bases loaded in each of the last two frames, the Indians had plenty of opportunities to win that game.

Still, it's kind of warming to see Byrd shoulder the responsibility, trying to deflect attention from the ineptitude of his teammates, and I think they appreciate it. Cliff Lee has emulated Byrd's (communication) style this season, and I think it sets a good example and adds to the *esprit*

d'corps .

Which makes Perez' statement that much more jarring: yes, his WORDS say, "It is my fault" at the end, but the first statement sounds very much like, "Hey, I did MY job, if my bullpen and offense were worth a Vice Presidency's worth of warm spit, we would have been fine, but NOOOO, I get saddled with a loss even though I pitched okay, because my teammates blow." I mean, maybe I'm reading too much into that (and, truthfully, Perez did not pitch badly, and his teammates really *do* blow), but I just thought that a day after Paul Byrd laid his typical self-deprecation on the media, Perez' whining petulance came across a bit too vividly. (Careful readers skilled in inference may be able to discern which player's approach I prefer.)

3) Did you realize?

After admitting that batting average is not the best measure of offensive performance, permit me an observation, because it is the stat printed in the box score and it caught my eye:

Every Cleveland hitter 1-7 is batting over .270. The lowest batting average, at .272, belongs to ... TRAVIS HAFNER. (This is a lefty-facing lineup, so Michaels' .277 is in the lineup instead of Dellucci's lesser average.)

At various points in the season, I have been concerned by the low

averages sported by Sizemore, Blake, Peralta, and Garko, but these players have hit well enough since May 1 to be hitting .278, .280, .292, and .320 respectively. Josh Barfield, batting 8th, is still at .245, but this is because his April was so tremendously bad. And Franklin Gutierrez' .235 belies a small sample and a surprising power surge (slugging .588 after his second HR in 18 plate appearances).

This doesn't even touch upon the fact that Indians have been among the leaders in the majors in drawing walks as well.

There are things the offense could do better (it sports at least four regulars who hit so poorly with RISP, especially with 2 outs, that it hurts columnists' spleens), but there are some good hitters on this club.

4) The unlikely power brigade

Cleveland's first run scored when Josh Barfield drove a ball to the wall. He was thrown out trying to advance to third as Jason Michaels scored. This was unfortunate, because Cleveland's second run came when the following batter, Franklin Gutierrez, hit an opposite-field home run that cleared the wall by several inches. Michaels finished off Perez' day by hitting a home run to near-dead center. If you're counting at home, that makes three runs on extra base hits by a player slugging .343, a player

with 18 plate appearances whose appearance in the majors was delayed by a disappearance of power shown in the low minors, and a player who slugged .415, .415, and .391 in his previous three seasons.

5) Today's spit take

Now playing third base for the American League All-Stars, Casey Blake.

Okay, it might not happen: Alex Rodriguez is the obvious choice, and Mike Lowell is having a surprising renaissance and a significantly better season than Blake. But that isn't because Blake is stinking up the joint: as a third baseman, Blake has the third-highest VORP (Value Over Replacement Player) in the AL, and is hitting .280/.381/.502 with 9 HR and 32 RBI. By OPS, this is Blake's best season, but eerily-similar to his 2006 (.282/.356/.479) and breakout 2004 (.271/.354/.486). His 2005 was terrible: there's really no way around that, but there's also a non-baseball explanation (divorce) that seems credible from afar. It may be that this is actually Casey Blake, even as a 33-year-old.

Blake still has whomping bad difficulty hitting with RISP, with or

without 2 outs, and that's a legitimate concern, sample sizes be damned, because it has been a consistent problem through his career. Still, in the bottom of the 8th yesterday, Blake had the following AB with two outs and a man on third:

Ball, Ball, Strike (foul), Strike (swinging), Foul, Ball, Foul, Foul, Foul, Foul, Foul, Foul, homer to left

That means he fouled off *seven* 2-strike pitches before finally *homering*. Yes, the score was 6-1, possibly adding to his comfort level and preventing the possible "pressing" he does in RISP/2 out situations, but that's a heckuva at-bat.

6) Smallball in theory and practice

Generally, I eschew giving up precious outs, but it should be noted that with runners on 1st and 2nd with no outs in the 8th leading 3-1, Jason Michaels laid down a successful sacrifice

bunt: Josh Barfield lifted an 0-2 sacrifice fly as the next batter to score an insurance run. As it turned out, Gutierrez walked, Sizemore hit a two-run double, and Blake hit the two-run homer, so the "insurance" turned into "excessive excess," but the point remains that this is an arrow in the quiver.

7) Ho Hum Dept.

Rafael Betancourt blah blah strikes blah blah perfect inning blah blah 1 K.

Tom Mastny blah blah struggled with command blah blah 2 runs on two hits and a walk blah feh blah.

Mastny has an option left, and Matt Miller looks really really really really really ready in Beefalo. It would be a race to see if Mastny could re-find his

stuff in the time it took for Miller's elbow to SPROING, but it's a race worth running, in my pompous opinion.

Grady Sizemore blah blah 18th stolen base.

Fausto Carmona induced a double play, while Tony Pena Jr. made an error. I don't know which is more unexpected. I will need to review my math texts on how to compare "zero" to "zero" effectively.

8) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro dressed as Marilyn Manson and drove your neighborhood's ice cream truck, terrifying small children and parents. Ironically, he set new sales records in the male teenager age group. Okay, no, he didn't: no one listens to Marilyn Manson any more. Fire Eric Wedge.