Welcome back to reality Cleveland. After a stretch of success (started by the Browns draft) that had me Google mapping my own address to assure myself I still lived in Cleveland, the city got a hard slap in the face this weekend. The Cavs got ball-batted two times in Texas. And the Indians lost two of three to the lowly Reds in maddening fashion. Buff recaps the weekend set with Cincy in the Monday edition of The B-List.

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (36-23)	1	0	0	1
Reds (24-38)	1	0	0	2

W: Bailey (1-0) L: C. Lee (2-4) S: Weathers (12)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (37-23)	1	0	1	1
Reds (24-39)	2	1	1	0

W: Mastny (4-2) L: V. Santos (1-2) S: Borowski (18)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (37-24)	0	0	0	0
Reds (25-39)	0	0	0	0

W: McBeth (1-0) L: Fultz (3-1)

You know what I would like? I would like a higher correlation between "outhitting the opponent" and "beating the opponent." That would work for me.

1) Dominant

C.C. Sabathia turned in a tremendous performance against a bad team last time out, going 9 shutout innings to get the 1-0 win. Faced with the same situation in interleague play, Sabathia had much the same response, if not entirely the same result. The Reds put together a rally in the second with a single and a walk, but Sabathia induced one of the Alex Gonzalezi to ground into a double play to end the ersatz "threat."

I mention this inning because it represents exactly half of the baserunners the Reds had in 9 innings against Sabathia. In fact, Sabathia *was* as many baserunners as they had in that inning: not only did he hold the Reds to 3 hits and a walk, but he rapped two singles in three trips to the plate before being lifted for pinch-hitter Travis Hafner in the 10th. Given a chance to bat in the 10th, it is entirely possible that Sabathia would have been as productive at the plate as the Reds were against him as a *team*.

What stat should we start with? The nine complete innings? The 3 hits and a walk? The six strikeouts? The 79 strikes in 112 pitches? Sabathia threw fewer pitches in nine innings than his counterpart Aaron Harang threw in seven, and Harang's performance was sparkling. Sabathia induced 16 swings-and-misses, including at least one in every inning. He posted 7-pitch innings in both the 6th and the 9th. He basically made the Reds look very, very foolish for a long time, for which he was rewarded with nothing whatsoever. I believe Jorge De La Rosa sent him a sympathy fruit basket after the game.

But Sabathia pitched really well. I would be interested in seeing the argument that doesn't include Sabathia on the All-Star roster.

2) Really, Pompeii is quite lovely, except for that "Vesuvius thing"

The good news in Cliff Lee's start Friday was that he got through six complete innings only giving up four hits. He did walk three batters, but none of these batters came around to score. He also induced 12 ground ball outs to only 3 fly outs (he struck out three), which is a HUGE departure from his normal tendencies. Heck, it's virtually the *inverse* of this. Keeping the ball down's gotta be a good idea, especially in the Somewhat Nifty American Ball Park.

The bad news is that four of the fly balls that weren't outs were actually extra-base hits. In fact, all four of the hits could be read under the box score in that "let's embarrass the pitcher" section that tells exactly who served up the doubles, triples, and homers. When your name appears multiple times in this season, it's probably not the best start you've had. Jeremy Sowers' name shows up in this section a lot, for example.

The really bad news was that three of those four hits were home runs, the second of which came one out after the double. This means that in four hits, Lee managed to give up four runs.

Now, I can't tell you if the ground balls represented a real State Change for Lee or not: it is certainly something I've been harping on long enough to make Lee throw up at the very mention of a "ground ball." Cliff Lee may be my favorite Indian, but it's not likely that I am his favorite columnist. If it is, though, I think it would be a tremendous asset, especially given Lee's proclivity toward ...

... giving up three @#%*ing homers in one game! Aaah! Aaah! Aaaaaaaaaaah!

The really, *really* bad news was that the Indians chose this weekend to move away from the principles of Small Ball or Smart Ball or Medicine Ball and instead reverted to their 2006 practice of executing Squander Ball. This meant that Cleveland's nine hits, four walks, a hit batsman, and a balk resulted in exactly three runs, leaving Lee with his 4th loss that really wasn't that terrible a game pitched.

By the way, if someone looks worse at the plate with a bat in his hands than Cliff Lee, please tell me who it is so I can avoid accidentally seeing a highlight and blinding myself. Great googly moogly, *that's* why the DH was introduced.

3) Sheefle off to Beefalo

Last week I asked:

Is there a functional difference between Cliff Lee and Jeremy Sowers at this point? Both are left-handed. Both are on the thin side. And both are atrociously worthless and I want to close my eyes when they're on the mound.

So the answer is, "Yes, Cliff Lee can be effective in spots, but Sowers is far less cringeworthy with a bat in his hands." Sowers was given an all-expenses-paid trip to beautiful Beefalo, New York as a result of his sparkling 4-inning-plus-two-batters 7-hit

5-run gem that represented the worst start of the series by either team. Naturally, this is the game Cleveland won.

What to say about Sowers? Well, much in the way that I requested more ground balls from Lee (with limited success), Sowers did strike out 5 batters in his 4-plus innings (with even more-limited success). This illustrates two principles:

a) Striking out batters in and of itself is not enough to make Sowers an effective pitcher
b) I will be keeping my day job, as correctly identifying factors to make starting pitchers more effective does not appear to be my forte.

Really, though, in my defense, strikeouts are not the *ne plus ultra*
of the art of pitching: rather, they are
indicative
of a pitcher's ability to frustrate, confuse, and/or dominate hitters. It does no good to strike out more than a hitter an

inning if you are busy giving up more hits than strikeouts and a homer every other inning (which Sowers did). Of the 7 hits Sowers allowed, four were for extra bases, and all four men scored. I mean, that's simply not good. Sowers departs Cleveland with a lovely 6.93 ERA and a lifetime supply of Rice-a-Roni: I would like to believe that Sowers will be able to work something out in AAA and will make adjustments as "smart" pitchers are supposed to be able to do. I don't know if he has to return the Rice-a-Roni if he is called back to Cleveland, though.

(It bears mentioning that Sowers now leads the team with a 1.000 AVG and a 1.000 OBP, collecting a walk and a single in his two plate appearances. Since he is off the roster, though, fantasizing about his pinch-hitting for Travis Hafner is just so much wishful thinking.)

4) Squander Ball: it's wasterrific!

Homer Bailey is going to be a fine pitcher. The Austin American-Statesboy

covers Mr. Bailey's development in great detail, pretending that La Grange is somewhere close to Austin, which is technically true in that it's about 40 miles and 50 years away. (Matt Belisle, Saturday's starter, actually went to the high school my eldest son will attend in the fall.) Bailey is one of those brash Texas fireballers in the mold of A.J. Burnett or something, except with elbows: his control and command are not the finest, but he can throw a baseball.

The Indians were a tough test for Bailey, being a notoriously patient team. True to form, Bailey had already thrown 47 pitches through 2 innings and ended up needing 114 to finish 5, walking 4 guys, hitting one, and balking Josh Barfield to second base. However, Bailey helped hold the Indians to two runs in his five innings, getting significant help from ... the Indians themselves.

In the 4th inning, Victor Martinez fought off several two-strike pitches to finally lace a single to right. Trot Nixon followed with a double. Now, at this point, no Indian had swung at Bailey's first pitch, and he had rewarded them with 8 of 13 first-pitch balls. The only

batter not to require at least four pitches was Cliff Lee, who gave batting lessons to Jon Heder in "The Benchwarmers." With no outs and runners on first and second, David Dellucci hits the first pitch into moderate center field for a sacrifice fly. Now, this is maddening enough: David Dellucci should not be the player to break this string, as he isn't actually good. However, as Martinez scored the run (and Martinez is quite slow), Trot Nixon was busy being thrown out at third base. That is really Very Bad Baseball, especially since Barfield walked and was balked to second immediately thereafter. Even with the automatic out that is Cliff Lee coming up later, he would have represented the second out instead of the third, although this would only allow a different player to strand runners in scoring position.

Not to be outdone, the Indians loaded the bases in the 5th on a single and a pair of walks. At the plate, David Dellucci.

Strike (looking), Strike (swinging), Ball, Unbearably Grooved Incredibly Right In The

Middle Of The Strike Zone Completely Piped Fastball Strike (looking)

You swing at the first pitch the inning before, and NOW you get the revelation to take a pitch, except it is so right down the @#%*ing middle that Bailey is actually cringing on the mound after throwing it waiting for you to rocket it into his kidney? What the @#%* are you doing up there? Great Thoth's beak, that's just craptacular!

In the 8th (you thought I was done, didn't you?), lefty on the mound, Jason Michaels pinch-hits for Nixon and singles. Now, because of the clever lineup construction that puts Nixon and Dellucci back-to-back, we call in Franklin Gutierrez, who summons right-hander Gary Majewski, who induces a double play. Pretty

much anything other than a double play would have been good there, in that the next hitter (Barfield) doubled. And then Jhonny Peralta pinch-hits for Mike Rouse (don't get me started) and whiffs.

In the 9th (you thought I was done, didn't you?), Ryan Garko pinch-hits a home run to lead off the inning. Inhabited by the spirit of David Dellucci, Travis Hafner ends the game by watching strike three wander by him. (In his defense, it was a 3-2 count, but I'm not sure you can take that pitch 3-2.)

So, that takes care of Friday's game.

5) Squander Ball: it's profligacious!

On Sunday (you thought I was done, didn't you?), Aaron Harang was terrific, striking out 10 in 7 innings, allowing but 3 hits and a pair of walks. This isn't to say the Indians didn't have a couple of legitimate chances, any of which would have won the game because Sabathia was Really That Dominant. In the first, Blake doubled with one out and even made it to third on a wild pitch, but Nixon struck out to end the threat. In the third, Sabathia singled and Sizemore bunted his way on, but a double play erased Sizemore and Martinez whiffed with Sabathia on third.

But it was after Harang had left the game that the full flower of Squanderball was able to bloom: in the 8th, Sabathia hit his second single, followed by station-to-station singles by Sizemore and Martinez (sandwiched around a Blake popout) to load the bases. To end the threat, Ryan Garko, inspired by the earlier innings, decided to take the radical step of striking out.

Now, you could argue that having Sabathia run for himself in the 8th inning of a dominant performance was a good move, and I'm not sure I'd disagree. Generally speaking, one potential run on the basepaths pales

in comparison to Serious Damage being inflicted on the mound. We were into the Reds' bullpen at that point, and it had to be reasonable to expect another scoring chance (which we would get, after all). Still, does a pinch-runner score on Martinez' single? Eh, that seems like second-guessing. It still blows to leave the bases loaded, regardless.

In the 10th (you thought I was done?) Barfield reached on an infield single. Hafner pinch-hit for Sabathia, which at this point in the season is like bringing in Hafner to

pitch to Sabathia, and he flied out. With the left-handed John Quetzlcoatlus on the mound, Barfield was picked off, essentially ending the threat even before Sizemore meekly grounded out.

In the 12th (please tell me I'm going to be done soon), the Indians went for the Smallball walk, sacrifice (my God, Jhonny Peralta actually CAN bunt!), passed ball, sac fl... oops, it turns out that Josh Hamilton can throw.

Hey, who would have thought it? Maybe every scouting report ever? Actually, I agree with Wedge's argument to try to force a bad throw: it's the 12th, the second extra-inning game, let's try to go the fuck home. Michaels tried, Hamilton got him, that's not bad baseball, just frustrating.

And then we lost.

6) Welcome back!

Side-armer Matt Miller returned from his rehab assignment to throw one pitch to an indeterminate Alex Gonzalez. It wasn't a very good pitch.

I would like to see Miller become a reliable right-handed arm out of the pen: he was

terrific in Beefalo and has been very good (when healthy, which is not common) in the past. I'm a big Miller fan.

But it was a bad pitch. (And not a particularly good defensive effort, either.)

7) In the interest of fairness

Raise your hand if you expected David Dellucci to come through with a game-tying two-run homer in the 8th inning of Saturday's 8-6 win. Dellucci fouled off three two-strike pitches and then hit an opposite-field shot off Elbows Majewski to plate Jhonny Peralta and effectively send the game to extra innings. There was some Squanderball played Satruday as well, but it was rendered moot by the late-inning heroics of Dellucci,

whom I will still disparage. The man got one hit all weekend. I'm happy for it, I grant that it was a terrific piece of hitting, I would like it to come at a supra-Rousian rate.

8) Today's spit take

Mike Rouse intentionally walked

This is because Cliff Lee followed him and first base was open after a balk, but ... I didn't think I would ever, ever read that string in an official box score.

9) Nice weekends

Victor Martinez had at least one hit in all three games,

collecting 5 hits and driving in 3 runs. Josh Barfield also had at least a hit in each game, collecting four hits; Casey Blake had exactly one hit in each game to lengthen his hitting streak to 19 games. Grady Sizemore collected six hits, including a double and a homer, to hit safely in each game. Travis Hafner drove in two runs on outs, which is a good sign in that he has been making many, many outs, so

there are a lot of potential RBI there. (Seriously, Hafner is really flagging.) Mike Rouse struck out no more frequently than Cliff Lee.

Rafael Betancourt threw 2 hitless innings with 3 Ks Saturday, then 1 perfect inning with 2 Ks Sunday. Joe Borowski looked sharp collecting his 18th save (and

in a maintenance inning Friday). Tom Mastny did not spike himself.

10) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro been putting curare in Rafael

Betancourt's linament. Since that would probably be fatal, I doubt it, although it would explain Betancourt's relative speed on the mound. Fire Eric Wedge.