The Tribe got a much needed win last night, battering Philadelphia and young phenom hurler Cole Hamels to the tune of a 10-1 victory. Highlights of the game included a strong performance from Cliff Lee, continued mashing from super backup catcher Kelly Shoppach, and an unfortunate ending to Casey Blake's 26 game hitting streak. Buff breaks down the game for us in his unique fashion in today's B-List.

FINAL SCORE

Phillies (36-34)	0	0	0	0
Indians (41-28)	2	3	0	0

W: C. Lee (4-4) L: Hamels (9-3)

You know, when the matchup of starters was announced, I would not have been the least bit surprised to hear that the final score would end up 10-1, what with our struggling offense and Cliff Lee's propensity toward ... what's that you say?

1) That big, bloopy thing: really, that's handy, keep doing that

Cliff Lee has never exactly overpowered people, but one of the pitches that makes him effective is his primary offspeed pitch, the slow curve. It's not exactly Barry Zito's, but it's a good curve ball. Lately, Lee has been reluctant to throw the pitch under certain circumstances, like being behind in the count, facing a right-handed power hitter, in innings divisible by three, facing opponents with "s" in them, or while wearing a hat. Since returning from his injury, Lee has not thrown the pitch very often, and whether it was because of pain, feel, confidence, or lack

of command doesn't really matter. Lee's not a good enough pitcher to get by with just a cutter and various fastballs on a regular basis.

Last night, Lee threw some very nice curveballs, and also some amusingly terrible ones, but the point is, he threw them, and it helped him significantly. Lee coasted through seven innings of 5-hit ball, striking out 5 and walking zero. Walks had been a serious issue this season: in his previous 4 starts, Lee's K:BB ratios were 4:2, 4:3, 3:3, and 6:4. As a flyball pitcher, too many of these guys were left to roam around the bases: Lee is not going to induce a lot of double plays. Last night, Lee threw 65 strikes in 94 pitches and was in pretty good command for most of the night. The exception to this was in the fifth inning, when Lee hit both Wes Helms and Jimmy Rollins on 0-2 pitches. Rollins in particular was hit with a pitch that was probably meant to be a curveball, but did not actually break, causing Rollins to laugh out loud on his way to first. Indians fans can be excused for not laughing along with Rollins, as this loaded the bases, but Victor Martinez made a nice leaping catch of Shane Victorino's line drive to end the inning.

The only other mistake of the evening was the solo shot allowed to Ryan Howard, but Ryan Howard will hit a home run now and then. This is Lee's other bugaboo, having given up 8 home runs in his previous 5 starts, but one solo shot is not going to render Lee an ineffective starter.

Lee actually had a bit of déjà vu all over again when the second and third hitters of the game singled, bringing to mind Lee's last start in which he allowed 3 runs in the first inning. However, he got Howard and Aaron Rowand to strike out swinging, a harbinger of good things to come, as Lee's next three innings were of the 1-2-3 variety. Even in the inning in which Howard homered, Lee recorded two more swinging Ks, and his seventh inning featured a grand total of five pitches, including two first-pitch outs and a nice DP turn by Jhonny Peralta (ironically on a terrible throw by Lee). Lee did end up with his standard 6:10 GB:FB ratio, but with only one extra-base hit and no walks, I'd have to say the start was an unqualified success.

(It bears mentioning that Lee benefitted from some excellent defensive plays outlined below, but the start was still very good.)

2) Put me in, coach!

I tend to think of Kelly Shoppach as a backup catcher, largely because Kelly Shoppach is the backup catcher. Shoppach came to town with the reputation of being the superior defensive backstop, the one who would save us from all the baserunners rampaging around and stealing umpty-seven bases off poor, miserable Victor Martinez. Of course, in Bizarro Cleveland, Martinez has actually thrown out 29.2% of would-be base stealers, while Shoppach has thrown out only 17.6% (although this has something to do with Paul Byrd as well). To complete the metaphor, Shoppach has trumped Victor's bat with a ridiculous .391/.458/.656 batting line that makes Martinez look like Josh Barfield.

Shoppach got the nod against tough left-hander Cole Hamels to let Travis Hafner have the night off, and Shoppach responded by going 2-for-4 with a three-run homer, an RBI double, and two runs scored. Shoppach's blow against Hamels in the second inning essentially ended the game: although not literally true, it did allow Lee to be aggressive with the Philadelphia hitters and seemed to relax the rest of the lineup considerably as well.

By the way, Kelly Shoppach bats ninth.

I am not sure that Kelly Shoppach is really an everyday catcher: he is certainly not a .391 hitter or 1.100 OPS man. Let's temper our expectations here. However, he is hot, he certainly has power from the right side, he seems to call a good game behind the plate (not that Martinez does not, simply that Shoppach does: you don't have to denigrate one player to praise his counterpart), and he looks far less like a confused schoolgirl at the plate than either Ryan Garko or Travis Hafner (or David Dellucci or Trot Nixon, for that matter, but that's not nearly as relevant, although it does afford me the opportunity to compare both players to

confused schoolgirls, which I think needs to be done). At this point of the season, I would be strongly in favor of including both Shoppach and Martinez in the lineup, and if this comes at the expense of one of the aforementioned schoolgi ... er, players, so much the better. At least ride out the hot streak. Admittedly, there is the chance that frequent rest and favorable matchups play a more significant role in Shoppach's success than I'd like to think, but ... did I mention the man is hitting .391/.458/.656? There's a spot in the lineup for a guy hitting .391, yes?

3) Ending with a whimper

Josh Barfield made the last out of the bottom of the 8th with Casey Blake standing on deck. This was notable for the fact that Blake had been 0-for-3 with an HBP (including 1 run and an RBI) up to that point: unless Ferd Cabrera managed to give up 9 runs in the top of the frame, Blake would not get another opportunity to bat and his 26-game hitting streak would come to an end. Cabrera didn't, so the streak did. (I think even Casey would admit that this was an okay turn of events.)

Blake did have one play in the first inning that illustrated why the discerning fan will continue to cheer him, though: with Sizemore on third and Barfield on first, Blake hit a relatively harmless ground ball to shortstop, which could have been a double play. However, the Phils were not diligent in turning two, and Blake beat the relay throw to remain safe at first. (Because it wasn't a DP, he got credit for the RBI as Sizemore scored on the play.) This made a difference, as Victor Martinez' subsequent strikeout didn't end the inning, but rather served as the second out before Jhonny Peralta doubled Blake home.

Blake certainly has shortcomings as a player: his hit streak didn't really raise his average as much as you'd expect from a 26-gamer (he stands at .277 for the season), he still has woeful numbers with RISP, and is adequate at more phases of the game than he is excellent. However,

he plays hard, hustles, is very athletic, is versatile, and is a key player on the team. You could do worse than to emulate Casey Blake. I wonder if someone has told Blake that the Stanley Cup is over, though.

4) On the move

Blake had been moved from 2 to 3 recently, so the role of the #2 hitter had been taken by last year's version, the Left Fielder du Jour. I hated this last year when Jason Michaels wasn't hitting, and I've hated it thus far this year when it's Dellucci's Jour. In Michaels' defense, he has been hitting pretty well and isn't a terrible choice, given that he's one of the few guys on the squad who can run from base A to base B without needing oxygen and a deep tissue massage.

Another guy who can run is young Josh Barfield, and he got a turn in the two hole last night facing the left-handed Hamels. For as frustrated as I can become with Eric Wedge, I like this move a lot: Barfield is a fastish runner whose overall stats belie a very good recent stretch, hitting .345 in June. Of course, he comes within a pair of doubles and a sacrifice of having the dreaded N/N/N AVG/OBP/SLG, but .345 is still a valuable skill as long as it exists. He's also been making better contact: after striking out in 20% and 26% of his at-bats in the previous two months, Barfield has only 7 Ks in 58 ABs in June, and has shown he can hit the ball to right, potentially moving Sizemore over when he's on base.

I think the Brain Trust's plan was to eventually turn Barfield into an Omar Vizquel-type #2 hitter: I don't think Barfield will ever exhibit

enough plate discipline to lead off (even with a .345 average, his OBP is a pedestrian-for-a-leadoff-guy .350), but he could thrive in this kind of role. In any event, Barfield went 2-for-4 last night, driving in 3 runs with a two-run single and a sacrifice fly.

This is one of those cases where the careful balance between "predictable role" and "riding the hot hand" comes into play: I have inferred from the consistency of certain lineup constructions that Wedge believes his players will respond better over the long season if they are given some sense of their place on the team. Consistency begets consistency, in a sense. On the other hand, Barfield is hot, Hafner and Garko are not, and it would pay future dividends if Barfield could handle the #2 slot. There's a danger in looking like I'm praising a move because it worked, but I'll just have to make the point and let you decide where I've come from: I like the move for the reasons stated, and the fact that it worked simply makes me enjoy it more, it doesn't serve as the reason for my liking the move.

Amazing stat (or, at least, I was amazed): Barfield's 34 RBI place him fifth on the team, two behind Blake's 36 and 4 behind Peralta's 38. Every other Indian with at least 30 RBI has at least 10 HR: Barfield has TWO. (Barfield also leads the team in triples, which is about as pointless a stat as exists, but hey.) If the left field platoon of Michaels and Dellucci were considered one player (and it's a little more than 1 player, because they have played at the same time several times, or a little less than 1 player, because David Dellucci is a .697 OPS schmoe), they would have 38 RBI.

5) By the way, it would have worked the other way, too

Michaels, moved to the six slot, responded with a 2-for-3 night with a walk, a solo homer, and three runs scored. He is hitting .279 on the season, admittedly in carefully-managed situational playing time, but he certainly looks more comfortable to me this season compared to last.

6) Help, I've been dipped in liquid nitrogen and I can't get up!

Three Cleveland players did not get hits last night. One was Casey Blake, chronicled above. One was Mike Rouse: while this is not surprising, it was mitigated by the fact that he was a defensive replacement who did not get to make a plate appearance, thus allowing him to stay over the Halfdoza Line.

The other was Ryan Garko.

I don't know what to say about Ryan Garko. I have been a huge fan of his and thought he should have been given more opportunities last season. I found his need to "compete" for a lineup spot in Spring Training to be wasteful and pointless. And he certainly had a wonderful May. But right now, Ryan Garko is no more useful as an offensive threat than a potted plant. Garko managed to score a run last night after being plunked by Geoff Geary, but otherwise went 0-for-3 with a pair of strikeouts that made him look singularly inept. At this point, Garko is cold enough to warrant giving him some days off, especially in tandem with Shoppach's hot streak and Victor Martinez' continued Victor Martinezing. A temporary platoon of Garko and Hafner at DH, perhaps to the All-Star break may be in order.

There is the same careful balance to be struck here, in that the best way to get out of a slump is often to get more reps, not fewer. However, Garko is simply a huge drag on the offense, ersatz double through Thorman's glove notwithstanding. I don't know the solution, but the problem is pretty easy to identify.

7) Dee-fense!

Josh Barfield not only collected 2 hits and 3 RBI, but he made a wonderful diving stop and throw-from-the-knees to throw Chase Utley out in the fourth.

Franklin Gutierrez made a remarkable leaping catch while embedded in the wall in the sixth.

Jhonny Peralta made a wonderful scoop of an errant throw by Cliff Lee to turn a 1-6-3 double play in the seventh.

Victor Martinez made a surprisingly athletic catch of a line drive by Shane Victorino with the bases loaded to end the fifth.

8) Grady Sizemore Not Surprise Dept.

Sizemore had a nearly-perfect night at the plate, going 2-for-3 and

drawing two walks, scoring two runs, and stealing two bases. His steal of second in the first was largely superfluous, but his steal of third in the 5th inning after doubling directly led to a run, as Barfield hit a sacrifice fly and the rest of the inning was filled with gunk. Sizemore now has 22 steals on the season, to go with 13 doubles, 11 homers, 43 walks, and an .878 OPS, second only to Martinez' .919 amoung players with more than 100 AB. (C.C. Sabathia technically leads the Indians with a 1.333 OPS ... in 3 plate appearances.)

9) The accurate bullpen

Aaron Fultz threw 10 strikes in 15 pitches in a scoreless inning of work, allowing a single but striking out a batter. He did hit a batter, which is not so much "accurate" as "crummy."

Ferd Cabrera threw 15 strikes in 21 pitches in a scoreless inning of work. He also struck out a batter and managed to turn the unusual feat of giving up three singles to load the bases, but he did throw strikes and he didn't give up a run, so I'm going to qualify it as "success."

10) Goddammit Dept.

Will someone please tell Jhonny Peralta that he is slow?! For the love of all that is sacred, stop trying to stretch! Man!