The big man was large and in charge last night, looking dominant in a complete game win over the team he grew up cheering as a boy. In today's column, Buff breaks down CC's performance, tells us why Josh Barfield is perfect for the nine hole in the lineup, and suggests we may have seen the awakening of Pronk. It's the best Cleveland Indians column in existence. It's The B-List.

FINAL SCORE				
Athletics (39-36)	0	2	0	0
Indians (44-31)	0	1	0	2

W: Sabathia (11-2) L: C. Gaudin (6-3)

Just a reminder that entries are still being accepted for the Walt Svirsky Commemorative Haiku Contest: e-mail your 5-7-5 poem to me (buff@swerbsblurbs.com) on the topic of Oldberto Hernandez, and you may win a prize, acclaim, or something more valuable than Mike Rouse. Okay, actually, since I promise not to drive to your house and smack you in the ribs with a motorcycle chain, you will definitely win something more valuable than Mike Rouse, even if it's just me spelling your name correctly. But send ‘em anyway: contest ends Friday.

1) Beating the team of yesterday, today

C.C Sabathia had his customary "**Inning of Crap**" in the second, when a single, a double, an RBI groundout, and a single produced two runs. Sabathia then had help extending the
IoC
when Josh Barfield gacked on a potential inning-ending double play ball, Shannon Stewart fouled off foul two-strike pitches before finally succumbing on a K, and Marco Scutaro dribbled an infield single to load the bases with two outs. Sabathia then got Nick Swisher to end the
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on a fly out, but not before Sabathia had thrown 28 pitches and had given up four hits. Combined with a two-hit first inning, saved primarily by a double play grounder, Sabathia's start was somewhere between "inauspicious" and "Byrdian." (Sabathia has historically had bad fortune against his boyhood team.)

Sabathia then faced 18 batters over the next six innings. (Astute readers will calculate this to be the minumum. Less astute readers will notice that a lot of words have the letter "e" in them.)

The innings were not all perfect: Sabathia was helped by two double plays after leadoff singles in the seventh and eighth, but innings three through six featured a grand total of zero baserunning A's. Before hitting Jack Cust in the ninth and yielding a double to Dan Johnson, Sabathia had sailed through the previous six innings in 56 pitches, including a five-pitch 4th, seven-pitch 6th, and a six-pitch 8th. The 3rd was less efficient in terms of pitch count, because Sabathia needed a few extra pitches to strike out Eric Chavez, Jack Cust, and Bobby Crosby in order, all swinging at strike three.

I was convinced beyond convincitude that Eric Wedge was going to

bring Lord Joedemort out for the World's Cheapest Save (it was 5-2, still techincally a save situation), but I suppose that given a choice between giving his Alpha Dawg the complete game and padding Lord Joe's numbers, the Dawg growled loudly enough to force his hand. Sabathia ended the night with 76 strikes in 111 pitches, striking out 8 and walking zero. He gave up nine hits, but six were in the first two innings. In Sabathia's last 11 starts, he has walked 9 batters: on the season, he has 108 strikeouts and 17 walks. There was some talk eariler in the year about how unusual it would be for Paul Byrd to win more games than he walked batters, but ... well, it's unlikely, but Sabathia is not entirely out of the conversation. (Wins = half walks would still impress me, you know.)

2) The flawless bullpen

Well, I didn't see any flaws, except when Jason Stanford bid two hearts with only 16 points in his hand. That's the kind of error that shows the importance of experience in the bullpen: Hernandez would have used the Stayman Convention there, but this is the price of relative youth. (I'm 42, Stanford's youthful to me.)

By the way, Sabathia has pitched into the ninth inning of four of his last five games. This would make a lot of bullpens look good.

3) Pronk smash!

How hot has Travis Hafner been? Well, he came into the game hitting

.255, and his last extra-base hit was a double on June 11. He had only walked four times in his previous ten games, suggesting that pitchers were no longer being as fearful. His .228 average in May was very poor, yet looked positively adequate next to his June line of .190/.301/.222. I mean, that's really awful (in an admittedly small sample, but then, it's also a *Rousian* sample. It's really bad.). "Hot" would not be a very descriptive term, or at least less applicable than, say, "horrendous" or "poopy."

So it was nice to see Hafner hit an actual home run, his first in June, as well as stroking a second hit and scoring a second run. Both hits came on two-strike counts: the single to center and the homer to right. If Hafner can regain some of his extra-base ability, it will make things a lot easier for the rest of the offense and the pitching staff, and may ease the strain on Victor Martinez, whose back is beginning to hurt from carrying the whole damn offense.

4) Timely hitting

After a pair of groundouts in the fourth, Hafner singled and Jhonny Peralta drew a walk. After watching a strike and a ball, Ryan Garko hammered the next pitch over Mark Kotsay's head to score both runners on a double. The end position of all three base runners shows how well the ball was hit, as the average speed of these men could charitably be called "movement."

However, what made this hit so encouraging to me was that it was a pair of two-out RBI: Garko came into the game with 6 two-out RBI in 40

AB, and one of the runners he batted in was him (on a home run). He was hitting .175/.250/.300 in this situation, so anything that improves these numbers would be a real boon for the offense. Since breaking one of the worst slumps in recent memory, Garko has amassed 6 hits, 6 RBI, and 3 walks in 23 Abs in 8 games (including two late-inning replacements in Washington): modest numbers, to be sure, but still somewhat encouraging. Garko's double was his first in June, and only his second extra-base hit since June 9th.

Unrelated to Garko but still a nice example of a well-timed hit, Jason Michaels pinch-hit for Trot Nixon to face the left-handed reliever Alan Embree and laced an RBI double to the opposite field: only a nice cutoff by Kotsay and the timely firing of a neuron by Joel Skinner kept Ryan Garko from scoring or being the ninety-third Indian thrown out at the plate this season. Michaels has quietly put together an 8-game hit streak, including his last three trips to the plate (going 2-for-2 before being pinch-hit for against Washington). He's raised his average to .299 on the season and is slugging nearly .460, making him one of the better corner outfielder impersonators on the team.

5) I'm a sucker for the classics

Despite being on a bit of a mini-tear in which he'd amassed 12 hits and five multi-hit games in his past ten, Josh Barfield found himself once again back in the #9 slot in the order. It didn't faze

him much, as he collected a double off starter Chad Gaudin in four trips to the plate, his third extra-base hit in his past five games.

I like Barfield in the 9 hole for several reasons:

a) He still doesn't walk, so his OBP, even during a hot streak, is not as high as you'd like from a #2 hitter
b) Casey Blake is still more productive in the 2 slot than any other place in the lineup where he's had more than 5 at-bats, where I'm trading a few points of AVG and OBP for a hundred more of SLG
c) Our currently most-productive hitter, St. Victor Martinez, gets to hit third and gets a guaranteed plate appearance in the first inning
d) If Hafner is hitting, he's likely to come up with someone on base at some point in the game
e) I still like the idea of a "second leadoff man" in the 9 slot: if Barfield is hitting, he'll be on base for the top of the order, and if he's not, hey, he's in the 9 hole

I still lean toward the sabermetric axiom that over the course of the season, lineup construction yields just a handful of extra runs, comfortably in the "noise" range, but I like Blake at two and Martinez at three enough to feel a lot more comfortable with Barfield in the nine slot.

6) Mea Culpa Dept.

I should have followed my instincts and said nothing nice about Franklin Gutierrez. I will be more careful in the future, as Gutierrez and Grady Sizemore are the only two Indians not to get a hit last night. This includes Jason Michaels, who had one plate appearance, and Trot Nixon, who is seventy-three years old. Gutierrez was particularly worthless, striking out three times in four trips to the plate and leaving six men exactly in the same positions on base as they were when he strode to the plate, including two in scoring position to end innings and men on second and third after being started 3-0. That's a bad night at the dish, ladies and germs.

7) Blue Moon Special

Jhonny Peralta stole a base!

Not only that, but ***because*** Peralta stole a base, they intentionally walked Garko to put the force on to face Michaels, who then hit the RBI double. So not only did he steal a base, he stole a ***useful*** base.

Which is pretty neat.

8) Schadenfreude Dept.

The Tigers lost to the lowly Texas Rangers and a man whose parents were incapable of spelling "Cameron" 8-3 while Mike Maroth, just traded to St. Louis, threw 7 1/3 innings of two-hit ball against the Mets. It was the first loss of the year for Jeremy Bonderman and also featured sparkling outings by two new relievers, Macay McBride (1 R on 2 H in 1+ IP) and Someguy De La Cruz (3 R on 3 H including 1 HR in 1 IP).

Meanwhile, Minnesota reliever Matt Guerrier saw his ERA rise from 1.44 to 2.00 by giving up 3 runs in the 8th to Toronto as the Twins lost 8-5 to the Blue Jays. In one of the more amusing box score lines you'll see this week, Luis Gonzalez of the .179/.277/.244 batting line pinch-hit for the .304-hitting Luis Castillo, because someone has been feeding Ron Gardenhire mercury. Okay, I made that up, but short of heavy metal induced insanity, is there a good reason to do this?