Wow. What a ball game last night. The Indians conjured up memories of the 1995 squad, scoring five runs in the bottom of the ninth inning to come back and stun Oakland. The capper? A Kelly Shoppach three run walk off blast to left center off of a horrified Alan Embree that accounted for the 8-5 final. Buff recaps the thrilling win in today's B-List.

FINAL SCORE				
Athletics (39-37)	0	1	0	0
Indians (45-31)	1	0	2	0

W: Betancourt (1-0) L: Embree (1-1)

Wow.

1) The Pronkdigal Son Returns

Travis Hafner's previous struggles generating offense, especially power, were chronicled earlier this week. Because Hafner has been a super-productive player and is enormously popular, it's easy for fans to grasp on to small signs of encouragement, point to them, and say, "See, that's the hit that snaps him out of his funk!"

I'm not going to pretend to have any great insight on Hafner's struggles or the vagaries of single-digit sample sizes, but I will say that the fact that Hafner has had extra-base hits in each of the last two games is that sort of encouraging sign. Even moreso, the fact that the hits on Tuesday came with two strikes and the hit last night came with two outs in the ninth off a left-handed pitcher suggest a certain degree fo confidence that appeared to be missing for long stretches of May and June.

Hafner actually had two opportunities to make an offensive mark last night, as he came to the plate with the bases loaded in the 7th inning to face reliever Santiago Casilla. Hafner lined out, but even that is a good sign, being neither a Nixonian ground ball nor a weak popup, two things we have come to expect from Pronk based on May and early June. It wasn't a great defensive play or a truly crushed ball, but it was solid contact (a bit to the opposite field as well) and looked like the swing of an offensive contributor.

The ball he hit in the ninth to tie the game, a two-run double to right-center, was simply hammered. I do not believe that baseball is round any longer. Had the ball had some lift instead of being drilled on a rope, the game may have been over at that point.

Now, this isn't to say that Hafner had a tremendous no-doubt he's-all-the-way-back night at the plate: he drew a walk and had the double in five trips. He did drive in a third run on a ground out, but 1-for-4 is not exactly Phone the Neighbors / Wake the Kids kind of fare. Still, the outs were at least well-struck, and there's something to be said for carriage. Besides, I really want it to be true.

2) See ball, hit ball

With the score tied in the ninth and a tremendous amount of momentum in Cleveland's favor, Kelly Shoppach was sent to the plate to pinch-hit for Mike Rouse. (Imagine Rouse's shock at being pinch-hit for.) Ersatz closer Alan Embree had avoided the right-handed Jhonny Peralta with first base open after Hafner's double, so it seemed natural that he might avoid the right-handed Shoppach as well.

Fortunately, he did not.

Shoppach hit the grooved fastball a very long way over the left field wall and set a modern record for "least time needed for a catcher to circle the bases" at 0.00003 seconds. Shoppach's season hitting stats seem less relevant than the simple joy he exhibited at hitting the game-winning home run: sometimes it's nice to revel in the simple fandom of a moment rather than try to analyze why a three-run two-out game-winning home run is exciting.

3) Managerial Back-Patters

For all the grief I and others heap upon Eric Wedge, he did a neat job of managing his resources last night. After Ryan Garko poked an opposite field single (and Garko's approach is not giving me the same Warm Fuzzies that Hafner's is: he got a hit, and looked pretty fortunate to do it), Wedge brought Mike Rouse in to pinch-run. He could do this because then Rouse could step in at third base while Casey Blake slid across the diamond to play first. This had several nice effects: it maximized the amount of time before Rouse would come to the plate, Rouse is roughly eight hundred sixty two times faster than Garko, and it

didn't involve blowing the backup catcher or DH before the last inning (as Victor Martinez and Travis Hafner are the other credible first basemen on the team: Trot Nixon has taken some ground balls there, but is far from an experienced player there).

Rouse didn't score, but the defense and offense were set for the final frame. In fact, as Michaels made the last out, Josh Barfield in the "second leadoff slot" would lead off the ninth after going 2-for-3 up to that point.

Barfield didn't get on base, Grady Sizemore did, and Casey Blake did not. Blake did hit the ball pretty well, well enough to fool Sizemore, who was almost doubled off first base on the fly out to left. Victor then walked on four pitches, bring up Wedge's second nice move: bringing in Ben Francisco to pinch-run for the turtle-like Martinez. Now, I don't know if Ben Francisco is actually *fast*, but the very fact that he is neither Victor Martinez nor Ryan Garko automatically qualifies him as being a better choice for a baserunner. If the game goes to extra innings, obviously Shoppach will need to come in, but he's perfectly available at this point.

The decision bore fruit immediately, as Hafner's double to the wall was enough to score both runners. In my opinion, Martinez would not have scored. The fact that Francisco did took a lot of pressure off the rest of the offense.

And then after Peralta walked, the right-handed hitter Shoppach was available to face the known left-handed closer Embree in Rouse's spot.

Had Shoppach been out, Hafner would have moved to first and we would have sacrificed the DH slot for the rest of extra innings, but that was a small price to pay for the hitting and running arrangements orchestrated by Wedge.

4) Managerial Head-Scratchers

Actually, this is for Bob Geren, not Eric Wedge: I know Embree is the supposed "closer," but once he walked Martinez on four pitches, I found it hard to believe someone wasn't warming up. After the double by Hafner, the intentional walk to Peralta could have been done deliberately enough to allow a right-hander to get ready for Shoppach. I mean, c'mon, there was no way Wedge was going to let Rouse bat there, and even if he did, well, that'd be a good thing for Oakland, regardless of the pitcher, right? But then, even if you leave Embree in, why have him pitch to Shoppach? As slow as Hafner looks, he's fast enough with adrenaline and a jump to score on just about any hit: get the batter out, and it doesn't matter if the runners are on first and second or on all three bases. Forget pitching to Shoppach, who is hot: consider the next batter, Trot Nixon, who is the very definition of "not hot." And if Wedge wants to bring in F-Goot, well, bring in a righty and make him look bad instead.

About the only bad combination of pitcher and hitter you can think of there was Embree facing Shoppach. Just about anything else would have been preferable. I'm not looking the gift horse in the mouth, but ... I think I see a shadow on that bicuspid there.

5) Oh, by the way, my Favorite Player pitched

Cliff Lee didn't have a great start, but he had a pretty good one, at least a Quality Start. His problem, not unexpectedly, was the long ball: giving up a solo shot to Jack Cust is no longer a newsworthy accomplishment, and Mark Ellis was on fire last night. More inexcusable to me was giving up a double to Jason Kendall, who actually trumps Trot Nixon by playing with *three* forks in his back.

Lee ended the night giving up 6 hits and two walks in 6 innings, yielding 3 runs and striking out a trio of A's. His night started on a pretty good note, as his first seven pitches were all strikes (although Ellis blooped one of them for a single). He also worked out of a 1-out bases loaded jam in the third by getting Eric Chavez to pop out on the first (fat-looking) pitch and getting Cust to ground out. The ground out was typically unusual (if that can be a legal phrase), as Lee recorded his customer 4:11 GB:FB ratio.

I guess the thing that's a little frustrating about giving up the taters is that the Oakland offense is really pretty bad: Cust is the only batter from 4 through 9 with a batting average over .250, and Dan Johnson's .249 is the only other one about .236. I mean, that's just lame.

6) Department of Raffies

Tom Mastny gave up a run on two hits, but isn't named Raffy, so we ignore him.

Instead, let us revel in the Power of the Raffy, watching Rafael Perez record six outs in five batters, including three strikeouts and no hits, walks, or anything else remotely positive from the Oakland point of view. (The sixth out was Mark Ellis being caught trying to steal third. Rafael Betancourt was Raffy the Lesser last night, as after getting Shannon Stewart down 0-2, he was unable to polish him off and gave up a solo shot, the first run allowed by Betancourt since the second Cleveland Administration. Betancourt did throw one pitch out of the strike zone in eleven tries, though, virtually pikerish by Betancourt's standards.

7) Nice hose(s)!

Victor Martinez caught Ellis stealing on a strikeout-throwout double play. Ellis was also gunned down by Jason Michaels trying to stretch a single off Betancourt into a double.

8) Department of Corrections Dept.

Alert reader Joshua Finney pointed out that not only did I miss the fact that Luis Castillo had injured his hand sliding into home, necessitating his replacement by another second baseman, no matter how lame, but that I butchered Luis Rodriguez' name as well. This, and **not** mercury poisoning, explains Ron Gardenhire's choice of pinch-hitters in the ninth. I maintain that other options (including sliding Punto or Cirillo or Gardenhire's moustache or a garden gnome over there) were preferable, at least Rodriguez' appearance can't be dismissed out of hand. Still, this is like sending Mike Rouse to pinch-hit: you'd question

Wedge's sanity at that point, right?