Has there been a more underappreciated player in recent Indians history than Paul Byrd? The Byrd Man was $$$ in the bank again last night, moving his record to 13-5, and pitching the Indians to a 8-3 win over the Twinkies. In today's B-List, Buff breaks down Byrd's start, brags about a successful Cleveland Indians bunt, and talks about the impact youngsters Franklin Gutierrez and Asdrubal Cabrera have had on this team.

FINAL SCORE				
Twins (67-64)	0	0	0	0
Indians (73-57)	1	0	2	4

W: Byrd (13-5) L: Silva (10-13)

For Pete's sake, go to the damn games!

1) Cruise control

The end-of-night stats on Paul Byrd's start aren't going to look all that impressive, involving a hit an inning and no Ks. He walked a guy (notable), gave up a homer (not notable), and uncorked two wild pitches, one of which produced a run. A glance at the box score suggests a guy who did just enough to get by, giving up 3 runs in 6 innings for the Very Definition of a Quality Start, then hit the showers after 92 pitches and a third trip through the order.

Although these are indisputibly *facts*, they don't necessarily tell the *truth*: for four innings, Paul Byrd was about as sharp as Paul Byrd gets. Actually, that's a little unfair: he was as sharp as any non-strikeout pitcher gets: he allowed one baserunner, which he erased on a double play. Through four innings, three of

them were perfect, and 5 of the first 6 batters grounded out. (I'm not sure how to count the double play in the third: if it can be considered two groundouts, then 10 of the first 11 batters grounded out.) Paul Byrd is not normally a groundball pitcher, but given his penchant for allowing extra-base hits, it's not a bad thing when it happens.

The wheels sort of loosened in the fifth, when, fresh after getting his lead extended from 3-0 to 7-0, Byrd allowed 3 singles and two wild pitches to derail his shutout. Still, he stranded a runner on third and got out of the inning with only two runs scored. In the sixth, he gave up a solo shot to Jason Bartlett, a task which most A.L. pitchers have found difficult. And then he allowed the booming double to Mike Cuddyer to lead off the seventh, then walked Jason kubel and gave way to Raffy Perez.

Still, for those first four innings, Byrd looked about as good as one could: had Jake Westbrook had those first four innings, we all would have nodded sagely and expressed great confidence in his ability to finish out the season on a high note. Because it was Paul Byrd, we found ourselves wondering when the pumpkin suit would arrive. (It was the fifth.)

2) What'd you need the other two pitches for?

It's a little disconcerting to see Rafael Perez' name in the box score, as he had just pitched two innings the day before and has been used quite a bit over the past couple of months. And to see he threw an entire inning, well, that's a shame.

Except he needed a whole three pitches.

After getting two quick strikes on lead-footed catcher Mike Redmond, Perez threw a nasty slider in on Redmond's feet that he could do nothing with but ground it to

third. And ground it to third he did, where Casey Blake scrambled to third, hit Asdrubal Cabrera with a relay to get Kubel, and tripled up Redmond at first by a good step and a half. (Really, the hard part of the play was beating Kubel to second, not Redmond to first.)

You had to wonder a little why the lefty Perez was facing the right-handed hitting Redmond. Well, I mean, probably the most significant reason is that Perez is really, really good. As a converted starter and generally a whole-to-multi-inning guy, he knows how to pitch to right-handers just fine. And the third pitch he threw to Redmond was truly one of those where the only question is whether you can jerk it foul to get another chance or not. That's a nice pitch. Further, Perez has come into a couple of bases-loaded nobody-out situations this season (including one against the Twins in the Dome) and given up no runs, so he was clearly our top guy in that situation, even without the "security blanket" of a man on third. (I jest.)

But another factor is that the team had to be thinking about turning a double play with the brutally-slow Redmond at the plate (hitting .289, BTW: he may be a career backup, but the man can hit, although rather powerlessly): putting the left-handed Perez on the hill would ostensibly keep Kubel that much closer to the bag. As it turned out, that extra step meant the Indians didn't turn one of the more embarrassing 5-4-3 double plays in modern times.

By the way, the line of the night from Tom Hamilton: "You know, it's amazing how many times a triple play will kill a rally." How true that is.

3) Speaking of efficiency

Rafael Perez' 1-to-1 pitch-to-out ratio was obviously the top of the night: I believe Aaron Fultz had a 1-to-2 ratio once this season: the theoretical minimum is 0.33, but Perez flagrantly wasted two whole pitches to miss out on that. Also contributing to the cause, though, was youngster Jensen Lewis, who came in to

get the last out of the 8th on his first pitch, then sawed through the heart of the Twins order on 7 pitches to complete the game. In all, a 2-to-1 pitch-to-out ratio for Mr. Lewis, who threw 6 strikes in his 8 pitches.

4) Opponent Head Scratcher

Speaking of Lewis, he came into the game because Aaron Fultz had allowed consecutive two-out singles and the right-handed Torii Hunter was due up next.

Now, Hunter is a very fine player, arguably the best center fielder in the league this year. Sure, I'd take Grady's future over Hunter's, but only taking an 0-for-4 collar pushed Hunter below .300: he's slugging .545 on the season and has the defensive accolades as well. So Torii Hunter is a fine hiter, one with significantly more major-league experience than I have, and certainly knows what he's doing.

This having been said, this is a 5-run game, and you have two men on base with the 4-5-6 hitters following you. It is the 8th inning and this is probably your Last Alloted Rally at this point, provided you can get on base. You are facing Jensen Lewis, a guy you haven't seen much of because there hasn't been very much Jensen Lewis to see. Lewis has an unorthodox delivery, with a tendency to do something weird with runners on base. If you're going to swing at the first pitch from a guy with a weird kick whose ball comes out of his ear who is prone to walking guys with runners on, you'd better be damned sure you're going to drive that ball.

Grounding it to shortstop, for example, would not qualify.

5) Small Ball Fever!

A Cleveland Indian laid down a successful bunt!

(pause for awkward Shermy dance)

In the 4th inning, Franklin Gutierrez bunted the first pitch he saw from Carlos Silva ... well, foul. But the SECOND pitch he saw was bunted to Silva, and Casey Blake and Kenny Lofton were able to advance to 2nd and 3rd.

The cynic would point out that Shoppach's subsequent double would probably have scored both runners anyway, but it's still a good play (and nice to find out that Gutierrez is a capable bunter): with a 3-0 lead at the time, a single means two runs and breaks the game open. Requiring a double to do the same thing is a lot less likely.

6) The hard overbelly of the lineup

Sometimes, the game is simple. There is obviously not a isomorphic relationship between hitting and scoring (do an archive search for "ducks" and "pond"). However, there's at least a good correspondence between our so-called "run producing lineup spots" producing and offensive success.

In short, we're better when Martinez, Hafner, and Garko/whomever hit.

Martinez certainly had a good start to the season, but has been a bit sluggish since the All-Star break, and Hafner, of course, has been simply unHafnerry. (Garko is not entirely relevant, as he had the night off for Byrd's personal catcher, Kelly Shoppach, bouncing Martinez to first.) However, last night, both men were 2-for-4 with a pair of RBI ... both with two outs. That's a very encouraging sign, especially since Victor's RBI came on a two-run homer.

Caveat: Carlos Silva, although having a nice enough season, is a pretty hittable guy.

7) The capricious nature of youth

There's no disputing that the emergence of newish players Franklin Gutierrez and Asdrubal Cabrera has been a major story this season. Gutierrez has been a pleasant surprise with his rediscovered power stroke, while Cabrera has been a revelation as an offensive plus middle infielder.

It just bears mentioning that with any player, you'll get lines like the 0-for-8 aggregate collar the pair took last night: you have to remember not to weight them more because there's a smaller pool of data to compare them with.

(0-for-8's pretty bad, though.)

8) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro has developed a way of efficiently generating 10 gallons of bio-diesel from every trash bag of lawn trimmings, but won't tell anyone because he has all his money invested in oil companies. Fire Eric Wedge.