It was a successful holiday weekend for the Tribe as they took two of three from the White Sox, and went to the Minneapolis on Monday and beat Johan Santana for the FIFTH time this season. The Indians are six games up, with twenty five games to play ... and Buff still can't figure out how Paul Byrd is getting people out. And the Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine continues to pay dividends.

FINAL SCORE				
White Sox (57-78)	0	0	0	0
Indians (77-57)	0	0	0	0

W: Fultz (4-2) L: MacDougal (1-5) S: Betancourt (1)

FINAL SCORE				
White Sox (57-79)	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*
Indians (78-57)	*0*	*0*	*1*	*2*

W: Byrd (14-5) L: J. Vazquez (11-8)

FINAL SCORE				
White Sox (58-79)	*0*	*3*	*0*	*1*
Indians (78-58)	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*

W: Contreras (8-16) L: Westbrook (5-8)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (79-58)	1	1	1	0
Twins (69-69)	0	0	0	0

W: Sabathia (16-7) L: Santana (14-11)

Strange hyperset, really: three shutouts and one close game.

1) Department of the Unlikely

The best statistical performance this weekend was turned in by Paul Byrd, who threw a complete game 4-hit shutout, with two of the four hits coming in the final frame. Any shutout is obviously twice valuable, in that it is by definition a win, and it is equally by definition a night off for the bullpen.

One of the tough things about watching WGN's coverage of a game like this is not just being forced to listen to Hawk Harrelson and Empowering Jones (I forget the other guy's name, but he allows Harrelson to be Harrelson, and thus deserves derision, but it isn't Tom Paciorek, who actually allowed himself to be called "Wimpy" by a man he was more talented than, both on the field and in the broadcast booth.), but that the broadcast of the game is actually inaccurate. It's one thing to be subjected to blatant homerism: hey, we like when our worldview is reinforced. It's quite another to be subjected to biased coverage that actually detracts from being able to *understand* the game, leaving aside

the entertainment factor. I don't necessarily mind that Harrelson wants the White Sox to win. I mind when he flat-out lies to me about why they are or are not doing so.

Consider the first inning. Paul Byrd is known as a control pitcher, which means that announcers have generally been unable to discern why Paul Byrd retires batters. It can't be his velocity. It can't be his tremendous hammer curve, or his deceptive slider, or even his warbling knuckleball. He doesn't have any of these things. Since it is not obvious what Byrd is doing, it must be his control. And, fittingly enough, Byrd did have a very low walk total early in the season, although that has not really been the case for a number of starts now. Anyway, Harrelson saw umpire Laz Diaz give Byrd an outside strike (and it might have been off the plate: it's hard to tell from the offset camera angle) and opined that:

a) Byrd got that call because he has a reputation as a control pitcher
b) If Byrd was going to continue to get that call, he'd be tough to beat
c) This was patently unfair to the White Sox

Actually, he did not say c) aloud, but the subtext was pretty clear.

Guess what he said when Javier Vazquez got the exact same call in the bottom of the inning.

At this point, a reasonable observer might draw a conclusion about Diaz' strike zone. Instead, I get an interminable diatribe about how Paul

Byrd is gaming the system.

This having been said, Byrd threw 78 strikes in 110 pitches, and although he walked two, one of them was in the ninth inning, an inning he would never have pitched had the game been closer or it weren't a potential shutout cookie. Byrd was actually quite terrific: none of the four hits were for extra bases, and thanks to a double play and a caught stealing, Byrd faced the minimum through SEVEN innings. That he got three flyball outs to center in the 8th and loaded the bases in the 9th seems almost irrelevant: again, had we needed better, Byrd would simply have tipped his hat after the 8th. The fact that he struck out Jim Thome (on basically the same borderline outside corner pitch he got in the first, reaffirming that this was simply Diaz' strike zone and not some Paul Byrd Conspiracy) and got a weak fly from Paul Konerko with those loaded bases made it that much more impressive a finish.

This is Byrd's second shutout on the season: he has an ERA of 4.19 on the season and a 14-5 record. He won't get any Cy Young votes (and would likely scoff at the suggestion) because he doesn't deserve them, but the difference between Byrd 2006 and Byrd 2007 is enormous, and a significant contributing factor to the Indians' success this season.

2) I could have done that, but I didn't need the cookie

Putting a second shutout on the resume might help Paul Byrd in future contract talks: putting another shutout on C.C. Sabathia's resume will likely make no difference whatsoever. The man is going to make a pretty large sum in his next contract, and I doubt that not being sent out to finish off the Twins Monday will mean much to the effort.

This having been said, Sabathia, facing Johan Santana yet again, came up with a huge outing in the Metrodome, holding the Twins scoreless for 8 innings on 6 hits and a walk, striking out 6. Unlike Byrd, he gave up an extra-base hit (a double by Alexi Casilla), but he was on the road and did a much better job of generally keeping the ball down (12:6 GO:FO ratio to Byrd's 11:12). Part of this can be attributed to the kinds of hitters the Twins and White Sox present to a pitcher, but it's potentially significant nonetheless.

Sabathia pounded the strike zone with 70 strikes in 100 pitches, and finished strong, allowing only 1 baserunner over the final three innings. He did benefit from an early baserunning gaffe by Casilla, but when the Twins had an opportunity to score, Sabathia made good pitches and finished off the inning.

3) Dear Sir: Your script, "Eighth Inning Comeback," has been rejected on the grounds that it is excessively implausible

Things did not look good Friday when a struggling Fausto Carmona was left out to give up three more runs in the sixth inning to put the Indians in a 5-0 hole. Mark Buehrle had been cruising to that point, having given up one hit and no walks through five complete innings. The Indians did manage to scratch out two runs on three singles and a run-scoring groundout (there was a HBP, but it didn't factor in the scoring), but went meekly in order in the seventh as Buehrle finally called it a night after seven.

Ehren Wasserman sandwiched a pair of outs around a Grady Sizemore single, then gave way to lefty specialist Mike Myers to face Travis Hafner. Now, Myers is not having a great season: he was flat-out released by the Yankees despite doing some decent work. Still, he threw four submarine pitches to Hafner, who swung at nary a one, and walked him immediately. I guess Ozzie Guillen figured he didn't have anyone with a better shot to get the switch-hitting Victor Martinez out, so Myers pitched to Martinez and yielded a run-scoring single.

Mike MacDougal came on to face the clearly right-handed Ryan Garko, and after watching five pitches of varying quality (3 balls, 2 strikes), Garko singled to left to score Hafner and send pinch-runner Chris Gomez to third. MacDougal then began a sequence I can only describe as "doubleplus ungood:"

Peralta: Ball, Ball, Ball, Ball
Lofton: Ball, Ball, Ball, Ball

Yes, that's Kenny Lofton, again pinch-hitting, again drawing a bases-loaded walk. This one only tied the game, but it was impressive nonetheless. MacDougal then started Casey Blake with a ninth straight ball, then the crowd winced as Casey took two strikes (there are two outs at this point, after all),then shuddered as Casey took two more balls, and then, instead of following his bliss and taking what could potentially have been ball four and helped him remain permanently mired in Casey Blakitude, protected the plate and slapped the outside offering (too close to take) right down the line for a bases-clearing three-run double to end the scoring at 8-5.

Now, of all the surprising things that happened here, the one that probably surprised me the most was Guillen's bullpen management: in 2005, his handling of the staff was a large part of their Series-winning campaign, and this was truly execrable. But the 8th inning featured ALL the runs scoring with two outs (a sore spot for Cleveland), three of them off the bat of Casey Blake (a really, *really* sore spot for Cleveland), and one of them was Lofton, who had drawn another bases-loaded walk as a pinch-hitter. Now, one could argue that going up there hacking against a guy who had just walked the previous batter on four pitches, only one of which could be attributed to the fine batting eye of Jhonny Peralta, and who ended up

throwing 7 strikes in 25 pitches, is simply prudent, but still: going up to pinch-hit has to be kind of Nervous Energy Overload in the first place, and Lofton is not a tremendously patient hitter. The fact that he's been able to do it twice bodes really well for the Tribe.

4) Contractural obligation

Jake Westbrook pitched, then Cliff Lee pitched, then Tom Mastny pitched, then Mike Koplove pitched. Only Mastny wasn't truly poor. The offense was, though.

Thus ends my obligation to talk about Sunday's game.

5) Seriously

Cliff Lee MIGHT make the post-season roster, but Mike Koplove sure won't. Right now, frankly, I can't imagine a reason to bring Lee: you need FEWER pitchers in the post-season, not MORE.

6) Pronk Nickel and Dime!

That's not entirely fair, as Hafner did blast a double to the wall off left-handed reliever Matt Thornton for an RBI Saturday, but really, the important thing was that Hafner got a hit in each of the four games. Sure, it was EXACTLY one hit in each game, but there weren't any collars. Any production from Hafner makes this team that much more dangerous.

7) Dept. of Raffies, Resting Joe Subdivision

Rafael Betancourt and Rafael Perez did something they haven't done much this season: pitched the ninth inning of a nine-inning game in which Cleveland had the lead. In fact, Raffy Betancourt got his first save of the season Friday with a perfect 1-K outing to polish off the stunned White Sox. Perez inherited a five-run lead Monday and thus didn't get a save for his hitless 1-walk 2-K inning to complete the whitewash of the Twins.

This had a whole lot more to do with Borowski's fatigue than any Paradigm Shift in the ranks of the bullpen: Betancourt hadn't pitched as often and was the best choice to get three outs, while Borowski was clearly winded in his "win" Thursday. The fact that Byrd was able to give everyone a blow Saturday and the offensive ineptitude gave the good relievers the night off Sunday ought to make for a fresher bullpen for the rest of the Twins series, then the four-gamer with Anaheim, whose pitching staff is excellent.

8) Power Surge

The three home runs hit this weekend were by Franklin Gutierrez (a hot 7-for-16 before being held hitless by Johan & Co.), Kelly Shoppach, who now has 5 hits in his past three starts (13 ABs), and Ryan Garko, who did not homer in August.

At this point, I see no reason not to consider right field and first base "covered positions" heading into 2008; Shoppach remains a backup in my view, but

this says more about Martinez than Shoppach.

9) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Aaron Fultz won Friday's game by pitching 2 innings of 1-hit (2 K) relief. He may have turned a conceptual corner after a rough patch after returning from the DL, now with 4 scoreless outings in a row. Perez has clearly supplanted him as most important lefty in the pen, but Fultz remains a viable option.

10) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro is gaslighting Paul Byrd, manipulating the radar gun readings higher to make him think he is overthrowing his fastball in an effort to challenge Jamie Moyer for slowest pitch on record. The last time Paul Byrd looked at a radar gun was when he was pitching for Philadelphia, and this statement is patently false.. Fire Eric Wedge.