Gark smash! With wins on Saturday and Sunday, the Tribe earned a split of the 4-game series with Anaheimish, as well as a 5-5 season series split ... without playing a single game in Cleveland. Sounds like good preparation to me! Forget the buffoons in brown and orange, we still have our men in red, white, and blue. Go Tribe!

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (81-60)	0	0	0	0
Angels (84-57)	1	0	0	0

W: S. Shields (4-5) L: Betancourt (4-1)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (82-60)	0	0	0	0
Angels (84-58)	0	0	0	0

W: Sabathia (17-7) L: E. Santana (6-13)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (83-60)	0	0	0	5
Angels (84-59)	1	1	0	0

W: Laffey (3-1) L: Jer. Weaver (11-7)

When my elder son was little, he liked Thomas the Tank Engine. Now that years have passed, Thomas is a pleasant memory, but isn't something he wants to experience any more: his entertainment value is finished, and he is considered old and trite.

Someone should relay this tale to the Anaheimish Angels and their Rally Monkey.

1) Forget his stomach, look at the size of his *back*

There are any number of ways to lose a baseball game: you can get simply waxed (like we did Thursday), or blow a close game in the last inning (like we did Friday), or some other variety, but after losing to the same team a couple different ways, the thought creeps into a fan's mind that the opponent either "has our number" or "is simply better" than we are. After a couple of games like that against a potential playoff foe, it's really valuable to be able to come back and win one, just to lower the anxiety level and make it feel more like equal footing. Better yet, we'd need someone to carry the offense for at least a half-game because they'd been made to look so futile in the past two games, scoring 3 and 2 runs, respectively.

C.C. Sabathia would not match up with Ervin Santana in the playoffs unless something went awry in the week leading up to the game: he'd be up against one of the pitchers who started the Angels' wins, either John Lackey or Kelvim Escobar. On the other hand, who the heck cares? Sabathia wasn't perfect or anything, but he sure was good, and his performance seemed to give the team a measurable lift. Sabathia went the distance for his fourth complete game of the season, giving up 1 run on 5 hits in an efficient 103 pitches. The lone run was given up on a single by Juan Rivera well after the eventual outcome seemed doubtful, although it was a little disappointing that Robuhbuh Quinlan's grounder to third with men on first and second couldn't have been turned into another triple play. (What is it with the nickname "Robb?" Is his real name "Robbert?" Should I consider going by "Stevve," or going whole hog and doubling the last bit to make "Buffff?")

We've gone over the string of 2-or-fewer earned run starts the last couple of times, so let's stick with just this game: in the 8th inning that featured the run, the three baserunners were on an infield single, a walk, and a single up the middle. (The aforementioned Not Triple Play was "merely" a double play, the fourth of the game for the Tribe.) This brought a fifth hitter of the inning to the plate ... for the **first time**. That's right, each of the previous innings featured Sabathia facing three or four hitters. He faced a fourth hitter for the first time in the 3

rd

inning due to a two-out single: he had already erased the baserunner from Casey Blake's error with a double play. So he faced a fourth hitter in the third in a 4-hitter inning, and a fourth hitter in the eighth in a 5-hitter inning, and ... that's it. In seven of the nine innings, Sabathia faced the minimum three hitters.

Now, this isn't to say the innings were all perfect: after all, with 5 hits, a walk, and an error, there were 7 baserunners. One scored. Two were left on base. FOUR were erased on double play grounders induced by Sabathia.

We could quibble about the three strikeouts and claim that Sabathia wasn't really that dominant, but then we'd be stupid. Let's not be that stupid.

2) A contrast in lacking contrast

Sabathia's performance was sandwiched around a pair of two-run efforts from groundball pitchers, the difference being that Jake Westbrook had to hang with John Lackey and Aaron Laffey got to face Jered Weaver on a night when he could not throw a breaking ball. Westbrook had one of those nights when he couldn't get some of the calls he needs to be at the top of his game (5 walks), while Laffey was able to work around some trouble in the first two innings before the Cleveland offense finally woke up and made his job both easier (he had a lead so could nibble less) and less necessary (we had the lead so he could pitch less).

Although we ultimately lost the game (because of Raffies, even!), Westbrook's start shows he has something to offer a team in the home stretch: a brisk 16:5 GO:FO ratio is excellent as always, an he only yielded two runs in 7 2/3 innings. In a sense, Westbrook was only really in trouble when he wasn't able to force once of the omnipresent grounders: Chone Figgins scored each of his runs against Westbrook as a result of an extra-base hit. In the first, he led off with a double and was able to score on a single, then scored again in the sixth when Orlando Cabrera was able to double as well.

On the other hand, Laffey's ability to force the Angels to pound the ball in front of the plate almost proven to be his undoing: he was inducing too *severe* a ground ball, as evidenced by the first hit of the game by My Sir Izturis (what we called a Baltimore Chop in my day) and the bouncer that Howie Kendrick hit for the roun-scoring error on Peralta (what we called a Terrible Throw in my, and everyone else's, day). Still, after giving up a second run in the 2nd (on a sac fly after a double), Laffey went back to the well and conjured up a ground ball out and a K. Laffey showed remarkable composure for a yoot, or at least more composure than I had watching him pitch: the third inning was his only 1-2-3 affair, and each of the other four innings featured at least TWO baserunners. That he was able to keep it to two runs (one earned) was a significant accomplishment.

Right now, Laffey is what he is: a fifth starter who keeps his team in the game as long as he doesn't go too deep and usually requires a long string of hits to give up the big inning because of his groundball tendencies. And he certainly doesn't appear to be afraid of pitching to good hitters or on the road or with runners on base. He just isn't overly GOOD at it. He's all

right ... he's still young ... but ... I think his upside maxes out at "John Tudor," and he's not there yet. I'm not even sure I'd put him on a post-season roster, in fact.

3) Gark smash!

Ryan Garko had a wonderful July, hitting .375/.440/.708 with 5 home runs and 9 doubles in 72 AB. However, in August, his power largely deserted him, so severely that he his ZERO home runs in 94 AB: although he did have 7 doubles, he still posted an ISO of .074, which is Frank Duffy Territory and also Not Very Good.

September hasn't been very kind to Garko, who is hitting only .171 with one walk thus far. However, his ability to hit the ball over the fence has returned, as he already has three home runs in 35 ABs (although, oddly enough, zero doubles, mostly a function of him having only six hits altogether). It will take being able to make more consistent contact (8 Ks this month already, compared to 12 in July and 17 in August in many more ABs) and taking a few more walks as well.

Until then, we'll just have to settle for pounding the ball over the wall: Garko absolutely PUNISHED a Very Bad Curveball from

Jered Weaver over both bullpens for the three-run blast that broke open Sunday's game. Granted, it was a terrible pitch, but Jhonny Peralta, for example, took basically the same pitch and laced a more mundane double down the line: opportunity is good, but you still have to get the job done, and Garko did.

However, had it not been for some uncharacteristically-lousy relief pitching from the Raffies on Friday night, we may have been talking about his solo shot off Francisco Rodriguez in the top of the ninth to tie the game at 2-2 instead. On a night when the Indians' offense had been completely throttled by Lackey and crew, Garko's homer breathed some life into a team that had been throttled the night before as well, and looked like a real turning point in the series. As it was, it was simply a good hit, and one we can hope represents a breakout from Garko, without whom the offense will be a real crapshoot in September and beyond.

4) St. Grady the Igniter

After Jered Weaver faced the minimum number of Indians through three innings (giving up a hit to Franklin Gutierrez, but getting him out on the basepaths), Grady Sizemore led off the 4th inning with a truly exquisite bunt down the third base line that he beat out by about fifteen feet. Yes, Sizemore is fast, but the

bunt was That Good. Sizemore then tested Mike Napoli, who had just returned from the DL, easily stealing second, although that was more off Weaver's long, convoluted pitching motion than any latent incompetence by Napoli.

Asdrubal Cabrera followed with a smash in the hole between first and second, which Casey Kotchman dove for and deflected back toward second base. Since Howie Kendrick was moving to his left to cover the grounder, the ball rolled harmlessly toward shortstop Orlando Cabrera, who reared back to throw as Sizemore was taking his final step toward the plate. It looks funny in the game log for Sizemore to score from second on an infield single ... but it wasn't close at all.

The Indians went on to score four more runs, including Garko's homer, but the run seemed to energize the offense (as well as unnerve Weaver), something Laffey needed a lot more than Sabathia did.

5) Dept. of Raffies, Normal Division

Jensen Lewis completed an inning and a third, but left a man on base for RBI machine Garret Anderson for left-hander Raffy Perez to clean up. Perez stifled a yawn, induced a popup and a groundout, and completed the 7th in seven pitches.

Returning for the 8th, Perez got a groundout, then struck out Eric Aybar and Casey Kotchman looking. He threw 9 strikes in 11 pitches in the perfect 8th.

6) Dept. of Raffies, Apparent Typo Division

Rafaels Perez and Betancourt were a bit less spectacular on Friday: spelling Jake Westbrook, Perez was able to escape the 8th without giving up a run, but put two men aboard in the bottom of the 9th after

Garko's shot for Betancourt to clean up, which he did on a three-pitch K and a groundout after a double steal by the Angels.

However, Betancourt allowed a leadoff double by Chone Figgins that turned into the winning run by the Angels when he was unable to retire Kendry Morales on a 1-2 count. In his defense, it wasn't far from being an inning-ending double play, but he did take the loss.

This was an unusually poor outing by both pitchers, thus the surprise factor. I still can't get upset with losing with our best on the mound, which is what happened here. Raffy Perez, for example, seems to have bounced back just fine as evidenced by

Sunday's outing. Betancourt is a larger concern, as he has already made 58 appearances on the year and has given up hits in three of his last four outings.

Think about this for a moment, though: he has given up a run in two of his last ten appearances, but because he gave up a HIT we are concerned. With a WHIP of 0.76 and an ERA of 1.59 on the season, this is how dominant Betancourt has been where you wonder if something is wrong if he allows a HIT. I wouldn't mind easing off the Raffy Throttle over the next few weeks, though: whereas Perez' 54 1/3 innings don't bother me as much because he's 25 and started as recently as this winter, Betancourt is 32 and probably hasn't started since the last time the Tribe was in the

playoffs.

7) Everybody hits!

Garko did have two homers on the weekend, but he did not have a hit in Saturday's game. This made him unusual, as every other Cleveland batter did have a hit, including two-out RBI by Sizemore, Peralta, and Kenny Lofton. Sizemore had a double and a triple, and Blake and Hafner added doubles of their own.

8) Terror on the basepaths!

On Saturday, the Indians also stole two bases: Peralta with his 4th and Gutierrez with his 8th.
Peralta now has quintupled his career basestealing total, although he has also been caught 3 times to give him a career 5:10 SB:CS ratio, which qualifies as "putrid."

Gutierrez, in my opinion, also stole his 9th base Sunday, but it will go in the record books as a caught stealing because he slid past the bag and was tagged as his hand momentarily lost contact with the base. I mean, if Torii Hunter hits a single and is thrown out when he rounds the base too far (which happened in the last

Minnesota series), he still gets credit for a single. Gutierrez beat the throw ... he was safe ... and then executed a very poor slide technique.

Sizemore stole two bases (one Friday, one Sunday), but Drooby Doo was picked off first by catcher Jeff Mathis. But against a fine pitching staff in a tough series on the road in which we were throttled for the first two games, it's encouraging to see the team try to manufacture some offense.

9) Around the horn

With groundball pitchers Jake Westbrook and Aaron Laffey on the hill, the Indians turned a total of four double plays on Friday and Sunday combined.

With C.C. Sabathia on the mound, the Indians ALSO turned four MORE double plays Saturday, including 3 of the 5-4-3 variety. Arguably the Indians would have turned amother one Sunday had Laffey not deflected Garret Anderson's ground ball to the

second-base side of the mound.

10) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro sprayed grass-killing chemicals into the outfield at Jacobs Field in the shape of the Michigan Wolverines' helmet logo. I don't believe anyone would admit to being a Michigan fan at this point after losses to Oregon and Schadenfreude State. Fire Eric Wedge. (Also, Romeo Crennel.)