Buff never likes to see the Yankees come to the plate with a chance to cut the lead to only seven, but he still survived last night's series opener long enough to submit the very first post-season B-List ever. In it, he describes how C.C. Sabathia proved his mettle against Bruce Froemming, how the Indians hit in the clutch, and how the two teams' bullpens might show a qualitative difference if you look closely enough. It's 1-0 Cleveland. It's the B-List. That's a good combo.

FINAL SCORE

Yankees (0-1)	1	0	0	1
Indians (1-0)	3	0	1	0

W: Sabathia (1-0) L: Wang (0-1)

You know, if you squint and catch the light just right, you might be able to discern a tiny sliver of difference between the qualities of the two bullpens.

I was a little surprised to see LeBron leave after 6, y'know, being a big fan and all.

1) Yes, but it was a *large* postage stamp, like Air Mail or Special Delivery!

Umpire Bruce Froemming has the reputation in the industry of having a strike zone that could charitably be described as "smallish." Oh, he's consistent, and it's the same strike zone for both teams, but it is not one of the larger strike zones you're likely to encounter in the playoffs. In fact, it is a strike zone that baseballs fit snugly into ... but snugly.

Don't believe me? Consider the AP write-up: not the Plain Dealer or Indians staffer or Victor Martinez, but **the AP**:

Not only did Sabathia, who came in 1-7 with a 7.13 ERA in his career against New York, have to deal with New York's awesome lineup, but plate umpire Bruce Froemming's strike zone was paper thin for the left-hander, who battled through 113 pitches, allowing three runs and four hits in five innings.

He walked six (his total for all September)...

Consider this: Sabathia, who has been lauded all season for his high strike percentage and his low walk totals, walked 6 men and threw only 62 strikes in 114 pitches (I cannot reconcile the difference between game log data and the AP writeup, but shoot, it's one pitch, eh?). That's barely over 50% strikes for a guy who regularly lives in the 75% range. Sabathia made 34 starts and walked 37 batters: his season-high was THREE (done twice), and he walked SIX last night. Now, sure, there's something to be said for pitching in the playoffs, and against an offense in the New York Yankees that is known far and wide for its patience at the plate, but ... come on! That's just awful.

(Of course, poor Chien-Ming Wang didn't fare much better: he didn't get the bottom half of the Sinker Zone and walked four men of his own in 4 2/3 innings.)

So, with six walks in just five innings of work, especially against the Yankees, an offensive machine, you'd expect that to come back to bite Sabathia. And you'd be right ... if, in fact, you weren't entirely wrong. ZERO of the six men who drew a walk scored a run. Zero! That's pretty bloody awesome, really, and includes two men in the first after a leadoff homer by Johnny Damon. In past seasons, getting squeezed for two walks after a home run jerked down the line and close enough to have been initially called foul might have led to a splendiferous **Inning of Crap™**

and a full-fledged meltdown from Sabathia.

Not last night.

Sabathia threw two more balls to Jorge Posada after walking Alex Rodriguez, then threw the following seven pitches:

Strike (looking), Strike (swinging), Strike (swinging), K
Strike (looking), Strike (looking), Foul, groundout

That's seven strikes in seven pitches for those of you scoring at home.

This isn't to say that Sabathia was flawless: after all, he was knocked out of the game after five innings and gave up three runs, all earned. It bears mentioning that the first two runs were solo homers, one down the line and the other a line drive that Franklin Gutierrez was prepared to play off the wall but snuck over. That the two homers were to left-handed hitters is an eyebrow-raiser, but on the other hand, it means that the dangerous right-handers in the lineup were held almost entirely in check. In fact, Sabathia's other two hits were a double by left-hander Bobby Abreu and an opposite field single by Toxic Avenger Duncan.

But the real defining sequence of the game came after Abreu's double drove in Duncan and cut the Cleveland lead to 4-3: with one out and first base open, Sabathia intentionally walked Alex Rodriguez. Now, I am not really interested in hearing a lot of smack about how A-Rod is a choker and blah blah blah: Alex Rodriguez had an unreal season. He hit fifty-four home runs. He drove in ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-FIX RUNS. I don't care what you think about the RBI as a stat: I want no

part of facing this man when I don't have to. In fact, the entire Legend of Lord Joedemort is built on the scaffolding of pitching to Rodriguez with first base open. So they didn't, and Posada came to the plate. Froemiming swiftly ran the count to 3-0, and then Sabathia strapped on his F*$# You Machine and proceeded to throw nothing but 95+ mph fastballs to Posada.

Posada hit two of them foul. He missed the other two. That's a strikeout.

Hideki Matsui popped up harmlessly (well, actually to Jhonny Peralta, which was kind of an Incaviglian Adventure, really, but he was still out) to end the inning ... bases loaded ... and the one-run lead preserved.

Huzzah!

2) With enough precision, a small difference can be detected

Much has been made about the back end of the Yankees' bullpen, where by "much" I mean "a nauseatingly large body of fawning worship." Joba Chamberlain is a wonderful character, and possibly a better pitcher, and Mariano Rivera's record of sustained success, especially in the post-season, arguably stands alone in the post-Gibsonian era. You may have missed these stories, unless you own a television, radio, computer, or functional retinas.

If the Yankees' bullpen has a weakness, it can be summed up in this manner:

Everyone else.

New York trotted out three young relievers last night, one a converted starter, and the other two combining for 15 1/3 innings pitched this season. Jose Veras and Ross Ohlendorf have 26 1/3 major-league innings between them, **combined**, for their **careers**. Now, this isn't to say that a fellow with little major-league experience can have success, but it is notable that these men are on the playoff roster while other veterans like Ron Villone are not. (Admittedly, leaving Ron Villone off a playoff roster cannot truly be considered "controversial" at this stage in his career, in that he was stuffed and mounted in 2004.)

And, in fact, it is possible to have a bullpen with contributors that are both young and relatively inexperienced. Consider ... oh ... how about OUR bullpen? After Froemming forced Eric Wedge's hand after five innings, Wedge called on Raffy Perez to scotch any thoughts the Yankees may have had about regaining the momentum. So it might be illustrative to compare Ohlendorf, called in to stem the tide Wang left behind, with Perez, who admittedly came in in a far, far, FAR more advantageous situation (start of an inning, no one on base, big lead, at home, compared to man on first, hyped crowd, big opponent momentum).

Ohlendorf: allowed steal, walked Gutierrez after 1-2, two-run double
Perez: groundout, swinging K, swinging K

Well, each man got a second inning of work:

Ohlendorf: homer, double, HBP, RBI double
Perez: swinging K, lineout, 3-pitch K looking

Now, it's obviously unfair to compare Ross Ohlendorf, who does have one of the better curveballs I've seen, to Raffy Perez, a primary setup man with over a year of great work under his belt. In a tighter game, Joe Torre may have been able to rouse himself from his dugout slumber and summoned someone else instead of giving Ohlendorf a taste of the Playoff Experience. This begs the question, though: who else? Bruney? Vizcaino? Peabrain Farnsworth? It was the fifth inning, fer crine out loud: the Indians aren't the most patient team in the league, but they're more patient than average. You have to figure, especially with Froemming behind the plate, that starters weren't going 7 full last night, so *someone* has to pitch before Joba Joba Joba. And that someone is ... well, when I find out, I'll letcha know. Veras did get a guy out, after all, although his season ERA of 5.79 isn't overly intimidating.

For Perez' part, let's face it, 2 perfect innings with 4 Ks (3 swinging) is simply tremendous. But more importantly, Raffy Perez was simply tremendous. What I mean here is that over the past couple of weeks, Perez has shown poor command and has been hit, especially off his nasty slider that needs to be his "out pitch" if he is going to maximize his effectiveness. If the Raffy Perez of mid-late September is in the bullpen, I am quite nervous indeed: if the Raffy Perez of the rest of the season is there, I feel supremely confident. And although there are other factors, Perez represents the difference between an Indians Bullpen and a Yankees Bullpen.

Much has been said offline about the decision to give Perez a second inning in what really was a blowout win. True, Perez threw 31 pitches and is unlikely to be available for extended work tonight. I'm not going to do a lot of defense of that decision except to point out that the batters in the top of the 7th were lefty Damon, righty Jeter, and lefty Abreu. Had any of these men reached base, I would have been surprised to see Perez face Rodriguez. However, Darren Lewis from the boards made a good point last night: Wedge has three crucial bullpen pitchers and Joe Borowski, and last night, he got all three some work. This is good in that they'd been inactive since last weekend (in terms of pitching live major-league innings: I rather doubt they were eating Cheetos watching Oprah, especially Perez, who appears to subsist without foodstuffs), but also because none of the three had ever made a playoff appearance. He got them their first experience in the most advantageous situation imaginable (big lead, home crowd), and now each has a very successful outing under his belt and potentially a huge amount of confidence.

Ultimately, though, it's hard to overestimate the advantage a Raffy-like Perez bestows on the Indians.

(Full disclosure and the Small World Coefficient in action: I used to work for Ross Ohlendorf's dad.)

3) Jensen is such an unusual name; may I call you "Raffy?"

Welcome to your playoff debut! You get to start out slowly: it's just MVP Alex Rodriguez, then .339-hitting Jorge Posada from his stronger side. No worries, mate!

All Jensen Lewis did in his playoff debut was throw 7 strikes in 8 pitches to record three consecutive outs, the last of which was a 3-pitch strikeout of Hideki Matsui, who looked confused at best and addled at worst. You come from the land of Hideo Nomo and Daisuke Matsuzaka, man! Lewis' windup would have been rejected for a grant at the Ministry of Silly Windups!

Normally, I expect to see Lewis before Perez, especially after a left-handed starter like Sabathia, but he was deployed masterfully and could hardly have pitched better (although Posada's fly to left *was* pretty deep).

4) Goes without saying

Raffy Betancourt.

5) Team smash!

Having squandered a chance to completely demoralize the Yankees in the three-run first by running the bases like Jhonny Peralta, the Indians faced Wang after an uneventful second by sending Asdrubal Cabrera to the plate. Cabrera, who had grounded into a double play in the first, watched a couple strikes, watched a couple balls, then watched a Not Sinker fly over the right field fence.

After the run-scoring fifth that brought the Yankees to within one run, Cabrera drew a walk, Hafner flew out, and Victor Martinez hit the first Not Sinker he saw over the wall in right-center. The 6-3 lead would probably have been enough breathing room, but that hit was a huge momentum-grabber-backer.

Travis Hafner then homered the next inning off Ohlendorf on a pitch he has only recently begun turning on again.

And Ryan Garko, facing the Wunderkind Phil Hughes with two outs, took an 0-2 pitch the other way to hit a solo shot to right.

The Indians added four double to make *eight* extra-base hits. They had more extra-base hits than singles. They had more singles than walks.

They had five walks.

6) Captains Clutch!

In the first inning, Travis Hafner got into scoring position after a walk and a single. Ryan Garko then singled in a run.

This put Martinez in scoring position. Jhonny Peralta walked.

With Martinez still in scoring position, Kenny Lofton singled in two runs.

In the fifth, Jhonny Peralta hustled on a blooper to right for a double to get into scoring position. Kenny Lofton singled in a run.

After Lofton stole second to get into scoring position, Franklin Gutierrez drew a walk.

With Lofton still in scoring position, Casey Blake looped a double down the right field line to score two runs.

With Blake in scoring position, Grady Sizemore flied out. It was the first time a Cleveland Indian had come to the plate with a runner in scoring position and made an out.

All of the situations above occurred **WITH TWO OUTS**.

7) He is not The Greatest!

However, "The Greatest" is at home as the team he coached faded down the stretch.

Kenny Lofton stole his first base of the post-season and the 33rd of his career, matching the all-time post-season mark currently held by Lofton and Rickey Henderson. When asked for comment, Henderson said, "Rickey is still the greatest."

Lofton went 3-for-4 with a run scored and 4 RBI. He also had one of the best "failed smile suppression" moments last night.

8) Dee-fense!

Frankline Gutierrez made a nice sliding catch in right field and showed both good range and enough of an arm threat to prevent the Yankees from testing it.

Victor Martinez threw out Robinson Cano trying to steal.

9) Everybody hits!

Casey Blake had one hit last night, the aforementioned two-run double.

I mention him because he was the only player NOT to

reach base at least twice last night. Martinez, Garko, and Lofton each had three hits. The team had fourteen hits, five walks, and 2 HBP, and left **six** on base.

(Grady Sizemore only had one hit, but was also hit by a pitch; Franklin Gutierrez didn't have ANY hits, but drew a pair of walks.)

10) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro attended last night's game wearing a Yankees hat. Actually, that was LeBron James; I always get those two mixed up. Fire Eric Wedge.