If you are part of the large following that makes The B-List a segment of your daily reading, you know nothing makes Buff happier than pitchers who throw strikes. So imagine his glee, watching Jake constantly get ahead of Red Sox hitters, all of whom were taking the first pitch. Buff breaks down Jake's start, displays some serious Man Love for Raffy Right and Kenny, and talks about the Indians clutch defense in today's column. Game four, tonight, 8 PM. Let's break their will.

FINAL SCORE				
Red Sox (1-2)	0	0	0	0
Indians (2-1)	0	2	0	0

W: Westbrook (1-1) L: Matsuzaka (0-1) S: Borowski (2)

Ah, yes, this is the script I remember, although I don't understand why the understudy is making an appearance.

1) I have a theory

It is my theory, and the theory is mine. It is this:

Strikes are good.

I did not say it was a revolutionary theory. I did not even claim that it was a particularly *theoretical* theory. But it is a theory to which I ascribe, and thus prescribe the application of this theory to all Cleveland pitchers whose last name ends with an "A."

Westbrook, of course, ends with a K, although he could certainly have used a dose of this theory against New York. However, in that start, Westbrook started off well and dissolved into a puddle of goo, while in this start, he began a bit shakily and "solved" into a pillar of strength. But most interestingly for those fans who watched the first two starting pitchers in this series, he did take the revolutionary action of throwing the first pitch to each batter into the strike zone, although, admittedly, that was a rather nebulous concept last night. (We'll address this further later.) Westbrook faced three hitters in the first, and each watched strike one. He faced five hitters in the second, and three watched strike one, while the other two swung at strike one. He faced three hitters in the third, and each was started with a strike (Dustin Pedroia was the first Red Sok to figure out through careful analysis that the first pitch from Westbrook would likely be striky.)

David Ortiz took a ball before doubling to lead off the 4th, but the next five hitters saw strike one before Julio Lugo took a first-pitch ball before grounding out to end the 5th. That means that of the first seventeen hitters, SIXTEEN were thrown a first-pitch strike by Westbrook. (This differs slightly from what I've seen elsewhere, because I am counting Pedroia's groundout as a strike.) Now, just throwing strikes is obviously not sufficient, or Ferd Cabrera would still have a job, but that's really just a fantastic way to approach a ball game. Westbrook finally lost his mojo around the end of the sixth, when both David Ortiz and Manny Ramirez were started 3-0, but Jake did get Manny to ground into a double play to end the inning, and no one could really have asked for more than six shutout innings from Westbrook in good conscience.

The double play by Ramirez points out the other, more expected feature of Westbrook's evening: that is to say, lots and lots of grass-killing worm abuse. Westbrook's signature sinker has always put him near the top of the majors in GB:FB ratio, and last night was no different: he only struck out two Red Sox (another, less desirable hallmark), but recorded 14 outs on ground balls while retiring 3 on fly balls. This included three double plays, including one in which third baseman Casey Blake played the role of shortstop pivot with The Shift on for David Ortiz. Two of Westbrook's 7 hits were for extra bases, including the two-run homer by Jason Varitek that represented the only real blight on Westbrook's night.

This isn't to say that Westbrook was overly dominant: you don't induce double plays unless there are men on base, and the Sox were able to load the bases with nobody out in the first on a walk, a single, and comical butchery. However, Westbrook induced a fly out and a double play and emerged unscatched. And in the 4th, Westbrook caught a bit of a break when Manny Ramirez' no-out grounder with Ortiz at second struck Ortiz, resulting in the first out of the inning. But really, until Westbrook threw his first truly bad pitch of the night, an elevated Bloopy Pitch to Varitek in the 7th, it would be hard to have asked for anything more from your starter, especially your #3.

2) Ho Hum Dept.

After Westbrook got a second out in the 7th after Varitek's homer, he lost Julio Lugo after getting up 0-2 and allowed an

infield single, ending his night. Jensen Lewis was summoned from the pen, freed from the
Aura of Crap
TM
, and struck out Pedroia swinging to end the inning.

Raffy Betancourt, in a bit of surprise to anyone who can count to forty-two (pitches), pitched a perfect 8th, featuring a second foul-off festival with Kevin Youkilis (who finally K'd swinging) and 11 strikes in 13 pitches. Betancourt sawed through the upper chest of the order in Youkilis, Ortiz, and Ramirez.

3) I will let you know

Someone came out and finished the game. I find myself pleasantly surprised as I read the box score, although his name somehow refuses to register in my cauterized brain.

4) Re-re-re-re-rejuvenated

The Internet is an amazing thing. I see all sorts of offers for chemicals, medicines, and supplements that will do all sorts of things for me, from sharpen my memory to enhance my manhood. But frankly, if I see an advertisement for something from "kennylofton.com," I am ordering it right away.

After Game Two, Jhonny Peralta was the team leader in total bases, but Peralta had a "subpar night," in that he made contact with a pitch too solidly to earn himself a Golden Sombrero. Going 0-for-4 with 3 Ks does little to pad your total bases lead.

Especially if you are competing with Kenny Lofton.

I heard an insightful bit of reporting from ESPN's (and former Virtual GM Target) Todd Walker, who said that Westbrook is very tough when ahead in the count because he throws two pitches to right-handers that look roughly the same leaving his hand (sinker in, slider away). If you're down in the count and he can throw either one, you are in serious trouble, because only the very best hitters can cover both.

Much of Daisuke Matsuzaka's success is generated in much the same way: he has a variety of pitches that show movement in a slider, a splitter, and other such nonsense. However, his primary fastball is pretty straight, sort of the Jose Mesa Special. And it hovered in the 92-94 range, which is obviously pretty good, but guys in the majors are adept at hitting such things great distances if they get it where they are looking for it. One expects that Lofton went to the plate prepared to take the first pitch unless it was one of these fastballs in one of these locations: in this case, belt high and middle-in.

Although it wasn't a great distance, it was an acceptable distance, and Lofton gave Cleveland a 2-0 lead they would never relinquish.

It hardly mattered that Lofton accomplished nothing else of interest during the game: at that point, the momentum, crowd, and electricity had shifted permanently to Cleveland's side of the ledger.

Kenny Lofton is 40 years old.

By the way, the choreographed handshake that Victor Martinez (who develops a unique "handshake" for each player on the roster) showed in the dugout was truly spectacular, second only to the Tim Robbins-John Cusack "Swanky Modes" routine from the movie "Tapeheads."

5) Dee-fense!

It's one thing to write "Jake Westbrook induced three double plays," but that doesn't really do justice to the team defense last night. The inning-ending double play that ended the second featured nice efforts from Jhonny Peralta and Ryan Garko to get the speedy Covelli Crisp, and the unusual 4-5-3 that erased Ortiz involved Cabrera making a nice play from the Belliard Zone in short right, firing a good throw to Blake, and a nice backhanded stab by Garko at the back end. Peralta also showed his arm on a ground ball by Pedroia in the 6th, calmly setting a firing on a play that many shortstops try to whirl and rush on. And the inning-ender in the sixth may have been relatively routine, but followed such a beautiful script (getting Manny with two on) that it was a welcome sight.

Franklin Gutierrez' catch of David Ortiz' liner in the 8th was nothing special, but showed the

value of having an athletic right fielder being able to set up deep in the late innings against a powerful hitter like Ortiz: the thought of that ball being hit to Trot Nixon does not fill me with happy sanguine thoughts.

It is noted that Ryan Garko made an error to load the bases in the first, but the threat was averted and Garko made enough nice plays at first to shrug it off.

6) The unreliability of eyewitness testimony

Since the Indians got out to an early lead and held it, scoring their runs off

hyperhyped starter Daisuke Matsuzaka, the perception is that the Tribe pounded the overrated "Dice-K" and proved him fraudulent, dominating the game along the way. The truth is, Matsuzaka didn't pitch a particularly good game, but the offense only collected five singles and a homer to go with a pair of walks. It is true that Matsuzaka gave up almost a run an inning, but he essentially threw one bad pitch to Lofton, was a victim of a nice piece of hitting by Cabrera, and fell victim to Julio Lugo's bizarre decision on Hafner's grounder to prevent a double play.

Matsuzaka also struck out 6 batters, but a bigger problem was that he simply had poor command. Matsuzaka threw 101 pitches in his 4 2/3 innings (leaving two men on base

for Mike Timlin to clean up, and only 59 were for strikes. Despite the two walks, Dice-K was constantly working deep into counts, often in favor of hitters: even if he'd been able to get out of the jam in the fifth, his night would probably have been over, as three of his five innings involved more than 20 pitches.

He sure made Jhonny Peralta look bad, though.

7) The unreliability of eyewitness testimony II

Everyone has had a version of the Naked

Dream, in which you suddenly realize that, out in a public setting like a final exam or an appearance on The Daily Show, you are totally unclothed, and this causes a lot of anxiety, unless you are Hiko. I haven't done a lot of reading on the psychological implications of this phenomenon, but it's a common experience and a disconcerting one as well.

Imagine, then, a version of this dream in which you are a major-league umpire, put on the largest stage, and suddenly you develop compound eyes like a fruit fly. Instead of tracking one split-fingered fastball through the strike zone, you see roughly ninety-seven baseballs, all flying through thirty-four different strike zones while being swung at by fifty-three batters. This would

be very disconcerting indeed. And although it might be prudent to tell someone of this, somehow you have lost the ability to speak and understand English, and instead hear the batter's and catcher's protestations as variations on the phrase "Argle bargle garble!"

Fortunately, you find that someone has slipped a Magic Eight Ball into your ball bag, and because you can hold it close enough to your compound eye, you can just make out what it says. Therefore, whenever anyone throws a pitch, you consult the Magic Eight Ball: "Definitely not" means the pitch was a ball. "Signs point to yes" means it was a strike. "Ask again later" is not helpful, causing more

anxiety, but fortunately you hit upon a plan in which if there are an odd number of pitches on your pitch counter, you can call it a strike, and and even number will imply a ball.

I have no evidence that this is what happened to to home plate umpire Brian Gorman, but I challenge you to convince me that it isn't at least as good an explanation of last night's strike zone as anything else.

8) Ignorance is bliss

Apparently no one has mentioned to Asdrubal Cabrera that he is a very young

player in a high-pressure situation, as he led the Indians with two hits and his third RBI of the series. Cabrera has at least one hit in each of the three games and is hitting .333 to place second in the Small Sample Size Sweepstakes behind Victor Martinez.

Cabrera has also played a fine second base. He's bigger than I thought he was.

9) Department of Corrections Dept.

I listed Josh Beckett's record as 1-0, when it should be his post-season record of 2-0. Similarly, C.C. Sabathia is now 1-1 in the post-season, not 0-1.

Going back further, I attributed a .500-plus batting average for the Yankees' series to Jhonny Peralta, when he actually hit .467. (Which is still pretty good.)

10) Sotto voce

Casey Blake singled and advanced on a wild pitch that actually stayed in *front* of catcher Jason Varitek, which is both a nice piece of hitting
and
a nice piece of baserunning. He scored the third run on Cabrera's single to center and is out-hitting Grady Sizemore for the series. Don't tell anyone.

11) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro celebrated the win last night by filling the Erie Canal with lime Jell-O™. I don't think that much lime Jell-O™ exists on Earth, and this statement is a big, fat lie. Fire Eric Wedge.