In the midst of ex-girlfriends singing the National Anthem, the bench-clearing brouhaha, C.C. laboring through inning after inning, and the inability of the Indians' hitters to figure out Josh Beckett, Game 5 boiled down to one decision. Eric Wedge deciding to bring C.C. Sabathia back into the game to start the 7th inning of a 2-1 ballgame. Paul Cousineau examines the decision and takes a look back at Thursday's loss.

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In the bottom of the 6th, as C.C. miraculously pulled his way through another inning while minimizing damage, the talk in the Mezzanine turned to how the Atomic Wedgie would set up the final three innings. With the top of the order coming up, could Jensen Lewis work an inning with LH Ortiz two hitters away, or would Raffy Perez work better in anticipation of Ortiz's AB?

At that point, the Indians were still only down 2-1, had a fully rested bullpen from Wednesday's off day and had used this formula (5 to 6 quality innings from the starter, the sequence of Lewis, Betancourt, Borowski to close it out) to win Games 3 and 4. True, the Tribe was trailing in this game, but with the opportunity to close out the series in Cleveland and subscribing to the idea that all the offense needed to do was cobble together one run to get to the Red Sox pen; this was a no-brainer, right?

As I returned from the Mens' Room as the top of the 7th started, my wife made the comment, "you're not going to be happy", being the first to point out that the pitcher standing on the mound with the ball to start the 7th

had the look of a certain Hefty Lefty. What's the rationale behind that? He had thrown 106 pitches to get through 6 innings and had not exactly blazed through the first 6, lucking into keeping the Indians in the game against the real Ace in the game, Beckett. At that point in the game, you thank the Big Fella for grinding out a Quality Start ("Quality" being a relative term) and tell him to wrap his left wing in some ice.

But there he stood (kind of hard to mistake C.C. for anyone else on the team), ready to face Dustin Pedroia and the top of the Red Sox lineup, pitch count and recent performance be damned, in a 2-1 game that the Indians were (amazingly) still squarely in. Now, if the 7th inning lineup shakes out to be Varitek, Crisp, and Lugo - maybe you give C.C. a chance to go out on a high note. But not with the top of the Boston order channeling the 1927 Yankees...not now.

As much as I wanted to give the benefit of the doubt to Wedge, who has pushed every button that needed to be pushed and has managed his team and his roster masterfully to this point in the playoffs, this one had the stomach acids churning. And it was kind of a big moment as even 1 more run by the Red Sox could put the game out of reach the way that Beckett was going.

Of course, we all know how this sordid tale ended, with Pedroia hitting a double and Youkilis hitting a triple before Sabathia was (finally and mercifully) pulled for Betancourt. And, despite Senor Slo-Mo's best efforts to put his finger in the dam, the damage was already done and the game was lost.

The other disturbing thing, outside of Wedge's decision to stick with C.C., is not even that he decided to use "ride with the horses that got him to the party" strategy that has served him so well throughout the postseason, but the way he handled the bullpen after the floodgates had opened. Down 2-1, or even 4-1, one would think that Wedge would stay the course and follow the playbook he's been following throughout October. But Betancourt's insertion in the 7th reeked of a desperate move and threw the sequential order in the bullpen (which had worked exceedingly well) out the window as the Indians were simply trying to stop the bleeding.

Whether or not the Indians would have been able to put more runs on the board against Beckett (who was simply dealing...as an "Ace" does) and

Papelbon is really an afterthought because the game was lost when Wedge allowed C.C. to stride to the mound in the 7th to face the top of the Boston lineup.

With that mistake staring the Tribe in the face and questions abounding about the Tribe's ability to go into Fenway and steal one, they head to Boston to try to close out the ALCS in enemy territory.

Let's hope that Fausto is able to make the adjustments that C.C. simply wasn't, and that Wedge's mistake doesn't turn into a series-changing moment in terms of momentum.