Two games with the Angels, two ninth-inning home runs to win. This time, the tables turned in the Tribe's direction, and the B-List highlights Jake Westbrook's evolution, Asdrubal Cabrera's unusual maturity as a hitter, and Jamey Carroll's unique blend of sacrificial team play and excitable dumbness. Buff even says something nice about David Dellucci! Clip and save!

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (4-4)	(3rd		1.5 GB CHW/KC)	0
Angels (5-3)	0	0	0	0

W: Westbrook (1-1) L: Speier (0-1)

Let me tell you, that was TOTALLY worth staying up past midnight for. TOTALLY. (And this time, I actually mean it.)

1) Now on sale at Home Depot: buzzaws

Let me try to illustrate what kind of game baseball is.

Jake Westbrook appears poised to have a career year. Fresh off signing a club-friendly three-year extension and polishing his changeup, Westbrook entered the season with unprecedented fan optimism that he could make a leap from "above-average innings-muncher" to "front of the rotation starter." And he certainly got off to a fine start: although leadoff hitter Chone Figgins bunted his way on on the first pitch, he was doubled off on a liner to short and Jake faced the minimum 3 hitters in only 9 pitches. His perfect second inning featured 3 groundouts and 10 pitches; his 4-man 3rd included a second bunt single and only 9 pitches. His 10-pitch 4th featured a second double play (of the more normal 4-6-3 variety), and his perfect 5th required a paltry 7 pitches. Through 5 scoreless innings, Westbrook yielded three singles, two of them succesful bunts, and only threw 45 pitches, or an average of 9 per inning.

In the 6th inning, after a groundout to third, Westbrook got Erick Aybar to swing and miss at a 2-1 pitch, but left the next pitch in a hittable portion of the zone and Aybar singled to center. After going 3-1 to Figgins, Westbrook got him to look at strike two, foul off the next pitch, then Figgins singled to right. His next pitch was pretty good, but Gary Matthews, Jr. was able to lift it to left and

Westbrook's shutout bid was ended.

After three pitches out of the strike zone, two of which Vladimir Guerrero fouled off, Westbrook threw the very most obese pitch of his entire professional career, and Guerrero hit it hard enough to dent steel. I mean he just CRUSHED it. Dead center. Oy vey. He really hit that ball. It was his 20th pitch of the inning.

Westbrook then retired the next seven hitters to finish the 6th and mow through perfect 7th and 8th innings. And after Cleveland took the lead in the top of the ninth, Westbrook, having thrown only 88 pitches, was allowed to return to the mound, where he rewarded the trust with a 6-pitch, 0-ball inning in which Guerrero was induced to smash his way into a 5-4-3 double

play. The 7th was particularly stressful in that it took TWELVE pitches due to two men striking out.

So, look at every inning but the 6th: Westbrook threw 9, 10, 9, 10, 7, 9, 12, and 6 pitches to record 24 outs, yielding two solid singles and two bunt singles. He walked nary a man and allowed a runner to reach third once on the strength of a pickoff throw error and a sacrifice fly. He induced two double plays and got a third on a baserunning gaffe. He only struck out 4 hitters, but ... he threw 72 pitches to complete those 8 innings! Seventy-two! That's just astonishing.

Even in the 6th, the singles were generally good pieces of hitting. And yet Jake Westbrook, who threw just a terrific, mow-em-down, no-fifth-batter-in-an-inning ball, stood to lose a 3-2 game because he threw one truly horrific pitch to one of the finest hitters of his generation.

And that's the thing: a 3-2 loss would have stung, but it wouldn't have been as tough-luck a loss as there is out there: losing 2-1, 2-0, or 1-0 is "tougher" in a sense. Three runs is good, but it isn't anything really great. C.C. Sabathia's ERA last season wasn't much higher

than 3. Think about that: the difference between a Super Dominant Start and Pretty Good Effort In A Loss is ... *one ... execrable ... pitch*.

Lost in all the terrifitude of Westbrook's start was an unusually-low 12:11 GO:FO ratio: I don't know whether that was due to an increased use of changeups and fastballs or because the Angels were making a concerted effort to lift the ball. (Matthews was clearly doing this on his sac fly, for example.) It's hard to argue that a man with a 94-pitch complete game with no walks lacked

command of his pitches (64:30 strike-to-ball ratio, modulo Guerrero Strikes). But when Westbrook really needed a double-play grounder, most notably in the 9th after Matthews led off with a single, he was able to get one, so it seems he still has his sinker.

I think, perhaps, that Jake Westbrook just may be a better pitcher than he was.

2) The return of Squander Ball

Of course, Westbrook was not the only pitcher to sail through the first four innings unscathed: Ervin Santana, he of the absurd home/road split, was able to match zeroes with Westbrook through four. Of course, he had some help from the Cleveland "offense:"

1st: Travis Hafner singles. Victor Martinez hits what looks like a double down the right field line (he is later credited with a single)

to Guerrero, and Hafner tries to score. This is ill-advised, as Guerrero has a fine arm and Hafner's legs are constructed entirely of cement. He is out by 0.8 Garkoes.

3rd: Casey Blake completes the one-man smallball suite of being hit by a pitch, stealing second, and advancing to third on a wild pitch. Grady Sizemore subsequently draws

a walk. Asdrubal Cabrera's fly to center is much too shallow, and Hafner simply makes the third out.

6th: With two outs and Ryan Garko on first (single), David Dellucci collects the first hit by a Cleveland left fielder with a double to deep right center. Garko is wisely held at third. Blake draws a four-pitch

walk. Jamey Carroll flies to right on the **first pitch** to end the inning.

Now, the Indians did score two runs in the fifth on a clutch two-out single by Cabrera: in fact, all four of Cleveland's runs were scored with two outs. But that's some mighty notable squandering sprinkled about

there as well.

3) Wait, what was that?

Yes! It's true! David Dellucci got a hit! And it was well-struck, too.

So why do I have lingering images of Trot Nixon not being able to reach the wall?

Ah, it doesn't matter (yet). Welcome back, Dave!

4) Managerial

Back-Patters

I may be overstating any sort of managerial acumen in the decision to bring Westbrook back out for the 9th: not only was his pitch count under 90, but with the exception of The Sincerely Bad Pitch,

there wasn't another available pitcher on the Cleveland roster likely to throw better than Westbrook was. I mean, the point of bringing in a reliever is to increase the likelihood of retiring the hitters, right? Either because of a matchup or fatigure or what have you. None of that applied

to Westbrook, so he was the "obvious" choice.

Still, it's probably hard sometimes to resist the chance to outthink yourself in a situation like that: maybe Guerrero is locked into

Westbrook's stuff, maybe a change of pace would be advantageous, maybe you can make hay with getting Borowski "back on the horse," maybe you can introduce another reliever to the concept of closing (Jen Lewis was warming up, but not in the capacity of

"closing," but more "just in case:" he's a lot more likely to whiff a batter if one reached third, and 90 is still a significant number of pitches). Maybe, maybe, maybe. Well, to his credit, Eric Wedge kept it simple and went to his best option:

Westbrook.

I also liked bringing in Jason Michaels to run for Garko in the 8th: it didn't work enough to score an actual run, but showed some fluid thinking. And letting David Dellucci, with a

dismal platoon split but facing a low-quality pitcher, hit against Fungal Darren Oliver instead of bringing in a right-hander that would likely have resulted in the far superior Scot Shields being summoned was a reasonable decision as well.

5) Dee-fense!

The 1-2-3 7-pitch 5th doesn't look like much in the game log (fly out, 5-3, 6-3), but the 5-3 was the result of a super play by Casey Blake, and Cabrera,

playing shortstop on Jhonny Peralta's night off, nearly pulled Garko off the bag at first with his throw, and Garko made an excellent stretch to retire the runner.

In fact, the Peralta-free infield of Blake, Cabrera, Carroll, and Garko looked pretty sharp: when it was modified (because of Michaels' pinch-running for Garko) to Marte, Cabrera, Carroll, and

Blake, it was rewarded with a smooth 5-4-3 keyed by Marte's clean job on Guerrero's ball to third.

Cabrera's stab of

Guerrero's liner in the first doubled off Figgins as well.

6) Pronk smash!

Great googly moogly.

7) The game behind the smash

I'm not going to exaggerate and tell you that Hafner's previous plate appearances were as encouraging as his home run in the ninth. Come on. That's simply not

true. But there are germs of encouragement to be had: his single in the first was to center field, his fly out in the 3rd was to left, and his ground out to end the 5th

was to shortstop (albeit fairly close to the bag: the Angels don't play The Shift, but they do positionally adjust).

On a different note, the reason Hafner's blow won the game was that with two outs and the count 1-2, Asdrubal Cabrera was able to hold back on two balls, fight off a 3-2

pitch for a foul, and ultimately draw a walk off Scot Shields. It's almost inconceivable that Cabrera is only 22 years old.

8) Small Ball vs. Dumb Ball

With men on first and second and nobody out in the fifth, new

acquisition Jamey Carroll was able to lay down a National-League-caliber sacrifice bunt that led directly to an extra run when Cabrera singled home both

runners an out later. That was good.

With the bases loaded and two outs, the third

baserunner the product of a FOUR-PITCH WALK, facing a tiring Ervin Santana (this would be his last batter and 107th pitch), Carroll

lofted a harmless fly ball to right on the FIRST BLOODY PITCH. That was dumb.

For the record, I

prefer limiting our use of Small Ball tactics. However, I think their frequency should grossly dwarf the number of time Dumb Ball tactics

are employed. My guess is that I will be disappointed on both counts.

9)

Hubbawhazzit?

After heroically fouling off four straight pitches of left-handed

reliever Fungal Oliver, Dellucci even more heroically volunteered to be hit by the next pitch. Jason Michaels, on first

base at the time, was running on the pitch, and thus was credited with a stolen base, because he wouldn't have ... been forced to ...

second ... by the ... wait a minute, what?

10) We stole two bases!

Well, ***I*** was impressed.

11) Yeah, but one of them was bogus

Shh!