In today's B-List, Buff wonders if maybe he's seen that large pitching fellow somewhere before, waxes poetic on relief pitching in general, but more than anything gives frequent updates on a seriously nice night at the dish for one Casey Blake. The B-List recaps the thrilling (well, not so much "thrilling" as "exhilirating") 15-1 romp over the Royals, pausing to notice even the Andy Martes and Ben Franciscoes along the way.

FINAL				**RE**
Indians (8-12)	(4 th		3.5 GB CHW)	0
Royals (9-11)	0	0	0	0

W: Sabathia (1-3) L: Meche (1-3)

Thanks to this game and the Detroit game 4/17, the Indians have actually outscored their opponents. Somehow this has not translated into a winning record.

1) Who was that guy?

The Kansas City Royals are a pretty good team for a struggling pitcher to face: they were just swept by the Oakland A's, but more to the point, they have scored 6 runs in a game exactly once this season, and lost that game. In the other nineteen games, they did not score a sixth run,

and in fully 20% of their games haven't scored a SECOND run. They slug .346 as a team and sport a woeful .657 team OPS. They have given over 50 plate appearances to a man with a .296 OPS. Their primary first baseman slugs .309 and has a single extra-base hit (a double). They have 40 extra-base hits as a TEAM. This offense is positively ... Cleveland-like.

Since it's considered poor form to send a pitcher out to face his own offense (the image of C.C. Sabathia facing Jason Michaels conjures images of the movable object facing the resistable force), the Tribe sent Sabathia out against Kansas City instead, and a funny thing happened:

Sabathia started locating his pitches.

This has been the primary problem to date: it's not that Sabathia has lost significant velocity, hitting 97 on the gun a number of times in his first four woeful starts. It's not so much that his pitches are flat with no movement. It's just that Sabathia's command has been dismal: so many opposing hitters have been smacking two-strike pitches that it's almost not worth Sabathia's time to get ahead in the count. Last night, however, Sabathia was able to hit the elusive "glove-side corner," meaning for Sabathia what is the inside corner to a right-handed hitter. For whatever reason, mechanical or otherwise, Sabathia was not hitting that spot in the first four games, and he hit it last night. He hit the other corner as well. He hit this spot, that spot, and the other spot, and he hit them with quality pitches, from 97-mph fastballs to 85-mph sliders. And this led to an interesting result on some two-strike pitches: Not Hits.

This isn't to say that Sabathia's performance was thoroughly dominating in the mold of, say, Cliff Lee. (Did I just write that? That I want one of our left-handed starters to be more like the other, and the direction is TOWARD **Cliff Lee**? I think I just swallowed my tongue.) In fact, after striking out David DeJesus to open the game, Sabathia's very next pitch was lined into center for a single. After a second K, Billy Butler looped a second single into short right. And then Sabathia escaped the first by getting Jose Guillen to whiff swinging.

Continuing the pattern in the second, the sixth batter singled. But then each of the next three men struck out, two swinging, and Sabathia was on his way to his best game of the season. Although he induced a double play in the third after a fourth single to break the streak of Ks, Sabathia wouldn't allow another hit for the remainder of his six scoreless innings and would end up with 11 strikeouts against 2 walks, a much more Sabathian ratio than the 1:1 he'd posted to this point.

Now, it took Sabathia 43 pitches to get through the first two innings and he was pulled (prudently) after six because he'd already hit 102 pitches. Strikeouts aren't the most efficient way to work, and Sabathia mixed in 34 balls in those 102 pitches to help result in those 6 baserunners. But look: all four hits were singles, and 8 of the 11 Ks were of the swinging variety. He got two strikes on 13 hitters, and only three reached base (two on walks). Since "putting away" hitters has been a major concern, this is very encouraging indeed. But even more encouraging, Sabathia simply had much much muchity much much better command of his stuff than he'd shown to this point, and in fact much more in line with performance of recent years past, giving Tribe fans hope that the proverbial corner is, in fact, barely in view behind him.

2) We interrupt this column to bring you this run-producing hit from Casey Blake

The Indians had scored three runs in the first three innings, and with Sabathia looking "back on track," it was a cause for hopeful optimism. The Indians hadn't exactly whaled on the ball, scoring two of the runs on sac flies, but they had reached base with some regularity.

The first two hitters didn't start off all that encouragingly: Jhonny Peralta swung through two pitches before singling to center, and Asdrubal Cabrera watched himself into a quick 0-2 hole before fighting off a couple foul balls and finally singling to right. Franklin Gutierrez then laid down such a fine bunt that instead of smallballing his way into a gratuitous sacrifice, he reached on a bunt single.

Casey Blake didn't like the first pitch.
Casey Blake didn't like the second pitch.
Casey Blake liked the third pitch a lot.

Blake's grand slam set the score at 7-0 and began a very comfortable remainder of the game. It wasn't a very good pitch by starter Gil Meche, but it was hit an awfully long way.

3) Psst ... we have a left fielder

Much was made of the early-season struggles of the Indians' sub-vaunted left field platoon. Jason Michaels got off to a very, very, liquid oxygen start and David Dellucci sported one of the more hilarious batting lines of .111/.689/.222 aftter his first hit (it had been .000/.364/.000 before that). While Michaels remains mired in Fungus City, USA, Dellucci has quietly plugged along since that .000 start: in his past 11 games, Dellucci has at least one hit in 9 of them. Of Dellucci's 11 hits, fully 5 are for extra bases, raising his SLG to a robust .500. And he sports a .275/.396/.500 batting line that looks Actually At Home on the ledger under "corner outfielder."

Dellucci was inspired enough by Blake's grand slam to hit a solo shot of his own, pulling a Meche offering over the right field wall to finally (if not mercifully) end Meche's night. He had already driven in a run, the only one of the first three to be scored on an actual hit. He then spent the rest of the night accomplishing nothing whatsoever, but c'mon, 2-for-5 with a homer and two ribs is still a good night at the plate.

In addition, his early-season-padded six walks are more than his 5 punchouts, and his .396 OBP would appear to play well in the two slot.

4) Adventures in Relief Pitching

Spotted a brisk 12-0 lead, relievers were called in not so much to put out a fire but to prevent a stream of ants from knocking down the Terminal Tower. So it was a little discouraging that after Jorge Julio's first six pitches, nary a one had been swung at, a man was standing on first base, and the count was 1-0 to Ross Gload.

Now, listen, Alex Gordon is a big boy. His thumbnail photo on ESPN's site appears to show a large growth on the right side of his neck that would seem to be an outbreak of More Neck. He can hit him some baseball. But the last guy to hit a 12-run solo shot was the inimitable Zoilo Versalles, who never did it either. Throw strikes!

Anyway, Julio got Gload to fly out, and John Buck grounded into a double play on the every next pitch. Now, this shows some serious lack of Baseball Acumen, seeing as Julio has thrown exactly two of his seven pitches for strikes to this point, but hey.

Later, in the ninth, Raffy Betancourt got the call to get some work in. This was mildly infuriating, in that I just addressed his non-use in Sunday's game, but again, hey. He struck out Jose Guillen to complete Guillen's lovely Golden Sombrero, struck out Gordon swinging on four pitches, and then ... walked Ross Gload on *four pitches*. Ross Gload! Who slugs .309! Up 15-1! Great googly moogly! Throw strikes!

Continuing a theme, Buck popped out on the FIRST PITCH HE SAW. Immediately after watching the batter in front of him walk on FOUR PITCHES. I mean, that's just astonishing. I guess he wanted to go home.

Ironically, the one Cleveland reliever to actually throw strikes, Jen Lewis, gave up the only run on a single, weak groundout, single combo. Had the weak groundout been actually hit well, it might have been an inning-ending double play. I'm havin' a hard time getting' worked up over that.

5) We interrupt this column to bring you this run-producing hit from Casey Blake

After the five-run 4th, the 5th started poorly with a pair of outs, but then Cabrera showed his Impressive Veteran Leadership by getting hit by a pitch. Gutierrez followed with a ball bollixed by Gordon at third, bringing Casey Blake to the plate.

Casey Blake didn't like the first pitch.
Casey Blake liked the second pitch a lot.

Actually, he liked it because it was virtually the same damned pitch Meche had thrown him the inning before, and he hit it in largely the same fashion, just a little more on a line and for significantly less distance. But Blake's double to left scored Cabrera and advanced Gutierrez to third, where he was able to score on Grady Sizemore's infield single one pitch later.

6) A work in process

Sometimes it makes sense to talk about the difference between *result* and *process*: the outcome of a single game is completely controlled by the results of each action, but the prognosis for

future success is greatly influenced by the process that produced these results. It is indisputably true that Travis Hafner went 0-for-5 last night, driving in a single run with a sacrifice fly and making six outs altogether.

However, consider the nature of these outs:

1st: fouled off three 1-2 pitches, lined out to left on a nice play by Mark Teahen
3rd: sac fly lifted a goodly distance to left, again going the other way
4th: took three pitches to go 2-1, lined out to center
9th: lined out on a rope to right

Now, that's four balls, all well-struck. Two of the outs were to the opposite field, one was pulled, and one went up the middle. See, you can dwell on Hafner's wretched .213 batting average, and, truth be told, that is pretty wretched, certainly for a 3 hitter. But it could be argued that the *kinds* of outs Hafner made last night suggest that, if nothing else, he's seeing the ball better in 2008 than he did in 2007.

The two Ks invoke the Thumper Rule.

7) Lost in the shuffle

Franklin Gutierrez and Jhonny Peralta each collected three hits last night. In addition to the bunt single, Gutierrez laced a pair of doubles, including a bases-loaded shot to left to complete the scoring for the Indians. He was stranded there to prevent him from scoring a 4th run on the night. Peralta led off the 7th with his 4th homer of the year and scored two runs.

8) We interrupt this column to bring you this run-producing hit by Casey Blake

After Gutierrez' first double, Blake came to the plate with 1 out.

Casey Blake didn't like the first pitch.
Casey Blake didn't like the second pitch.
Casey Blake was ambivalent about the third pitch but felt obligated to foul it off.
Casey Blake liked the fourth pitch a lot.

Sure, it would have been nice had the ball taken a weird hop to garner Blake a triple to complete the cycle on the night, but he settled for a double. On the night, Blake went 4-for-4, scored twice, and drove in six runs. (This is not his career high: in 2003 he went 5-for-5 with 7 RBI against the Twins ... but it's a pretty good game.)

9) We interrupt this Casey Blake for an Andy Marte sighting

After falling behind 1-2 and needing to foul off a 3-2 pitch, Andy Marte drew a walk off Jimmy Gobble.

Huzzah!

10) Managerial Head-Scratchers

Why on earth would you leave poor Jimmy Gobble out there for FORTY-FIVE PITCHES in ONE INNING? Geez, that just smacks of cruelty. I mean, Hafner used up 6 pitches in striking out, then Martinez 5 to double, Garko 6 more to walk, and then gritty-gutty-pesky Jamey Carroll fouled off approximately ninety-three pitches to finally single to right (actually on the 10th pitch). I mean, that's enough, right?

No, Cabrera then took 4 pitches to strike out. Okay, well that's enough, right?

No, Gutierrez then took 7 pitches to double everyone home. Okay, well THAT'S enough, right?

No, then Marte took 7 pitches to walk.

And that, as we say, was enough. Or, as we say, far too much.

(Sizemore grounded out on the first pitch he saw from the new reliever.)

11) Welcome to the bigs!

Ben Francisco made his first appearance of the year after being called up to temporarily replace Jake Westbrook, who was sent to the DL with a strained Westbrook muscle in his Westbrook. He hit the ball quite hard and very far, but it was a simple F-7 in this particular park.

12) We interrupt this column for a mundane hit by Casey Blake

The Indians squandered a golden opportunity to score more runs in the 3rd when Casey Blake was sent to the plate to lead off the inning. It is this kind of lack of foresight that has many Indians fans wondering if the coaching staff is really using all its resources to their fullest capacity. (He singled.)

13) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro owns the rights to every album by Adrian Belew's pop group "The Bears" and refuses to allow them to be re-issued. Actually, this isn't Shapiro's fault, although it does still piss me off. Fire Jorge Julio's vestibular therapist.