Cliff Lee. I mean ... Cliff Lee. We're talking about a historically unprecedented start for the Indians reborn lefty, who put the capper on a much needed series sweep of the Royals in Kansas City last night with a three hit shutout. Lee is now 4-0, with an ERA of 0.24! Not even The B-List is that good. Buff relives yesterdays twi-night wins over the division rival Royals.

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (9-12)	1	2	4	0
Royals (9-12)	1	0	1	0

W: Carmona (3-1) L: Tomko (1-3) S: Betancourt (1)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (10-12)	0	0	0	0
Royals (9-13)	0	0	0	0

W: Lee (4-0) L: Bannister (3-2)

A contrast in styles between two of the starting pitchers last night: Brett Tomko and Cliff Lee threw approximately the same number of pitches, except Lee completed his game and Tomko ... um ... didn't.

1) MC Cliff Lee

In the words of Stanley Burrell, "They couldn't touch that."

Let's go back into the archives for a moment:

4/13, top of the 4th
Travis Buck: Ball, Ball, T Buck tripled to right
Mark Ellis: Strike (foul), Strike (looking, Ball, M Ellis reached on infield single to shortstop, T Buck scored

Why do I bring this up? Because it is Cliff Lee's Earned Run in 2008. Singular. One. He had to throw a strike 2-0 to Buck, and Ellis placed a ground ball. When Travis Buck gathers his grandchildren around him in 40 years or so, each of whom he will likely call "Little Dude," he will regale them with the story of scoring Cliff Lee's Earned Run from the magical season in which Lee posted the 0.004 ERA. Then they'll all go surfing. Somehow I am not seeing Travis Buck breaking into minor league coaching.

You now, now and then I think about guys who have had easy jobs in the entertainment industry and think I could have done that job. I could have been a session drummer in the ‘50s and ‘60s: keep the beat and ride the high hat a little. I could have been the bass player for the Romantics: "What I Like About You" features a bass line consisting of three notes, none of which require actual fingering. And I would like to be Kelly Shoppach on a day when Cliff Lee is "on."

Think about the decision-making process here in calling the pitches.

All right, let's start with a fastball. Nope, he couldn't hit it.
Let's try that again. Nope, he couldn't hit that either.
Maybe move it over here: nope, can't hit that.
Over there, perhaps? Nope, can't hit that
(thirty pinpoint fastballs later)
Oh, hell, I'm bored, throw me a curve. Nope, can't hit that.
Okay, go back to the fastball. Nope, can't hit that.
(nine innings later)
I wonder what kind of sandwich we're having tonight?

Consider this: when David DeJesus lined an opposite-field single into the hole between short and third, it represented only the second time in four starts that Cliff Lee gave up a THIRD HIT. This hit raised his WHIP by **12.5%**. In nine complete innings, Lee fanned nine Royals, five of them swinging, and gave up nary a walk nor run. And to add to the mystique, I give you Cliff Lee's fifth inning: Jose Guillen pulled a fastball on a line to left field, where David Dellucci's dismal angle on the ball allowed it to turn into a double to the wall. Lee was so rattled by this misplay, he took three pitches to strike out Billy Butler looking at a brilliant pitch. After going 2-1 to Alex Gordon with the runner in scoring position, Lee pasted a fastball through the zone, then got Gordon trying to lumberjack a high fastball for the second K of the inning. And after Kelly Shoppach cleverly did not catch a pitch to Miguel Olivo, who was 3-for-4 with a homer in the first game, Lee induced a foul ball that none of three men caught down the right field line. So perturbed by this was Lee that he ... simply struck Olivo out on another Lumberjack Special.

So ... in a tight 0-0 ballgame ... in which his counterpart had just retired his thirteenth batter in a row ... in which 1 run was going to win the game ... in which the leadoff man doubled because his left fielder badly misplayed a liner ... in which the catcher collected his

three-hundred-ninth passed ball on the young season ... in which the defense bollixed a foul ball in triplicate ... Lee simply struck out the side, showing roughly the same emotion as Ben Stein.

Lee ended up throwing 86 of his 120 pitches for strikes. This was only 19 fewer strikes than five Cleveland pitchers threw in the first game ... in **fifty-one** more pitches. He has now thrown three consecutive starts of at least 8 innings, at most 3 hits, with one aggregate walk and an average of exactly one strikeout per inning. He is owned on 100% of ESPN Fantasy Teams, with an average initial draft position of ... ***never***
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2) And in this corner

Fausto Carmona was not quite a sharp, where by "not sharp" I mean "balloon-like."

Although the stats will say that Carmona threw 60 strikes in 98 pitches, the fact that he gave up 4 walks in five innings of work suggest that the strikes were poorly distributed. Or, if you look at the nine hits, including a double and a homer, you might say that distributing his strikes was a poor strategy anyway.

There's not much to say here: staked to a 7-1 lead, Carmona's command was sufficiently poor that it became questionable as to whether it was prudent to leave him out long enough to complete a fifth

inning to qualify for the win. And make no mistake, that's pretty much the reason he got to complete the (two-run) fifth. With an 8-2 lead, the 5th became a trial in patience:

DeJesus: single on 2-1
Teahen: double on 2-2
Butler: RBI groundout on 2-2
Gordon: single on 3-2
Olivo: single on 2-2
Gload: GIDP on 0-1

Sure, part of Carmona's stock in trade is the double play, and he recorded his customary 12:2 GO:FO ratio, but he gave up a home run, struck out only one, and generally looked like he was pitching with his eyes closed. It was good enough for a win ... but it wasn't actually *good*.

3) Adventures in pitching

This is the first look I've gotten at Brian Bannister this season up close and personal, and he really is kind of a fun guy to watch (as long as Cliff Lee is on the hill for us). Lee often threw the same pitch many times in a row with the only variable being the location: the number of variables for Bannister was hard to

keep track of. Each fastball he throws moves somewhere, and he intentionally throws some pitches (notably a breaking pitch that starts in the zone before waving good-bye) out of the strike zone. Although Lee obviously had a brilliant game, through 6 innings, it could be argued that he was merely second-best.

Travis Hafner hit a sharp ground ball that handcuffed Billy Butler at first: Butler is not known as a good defensive first baseman, largely because he is rigidly oafish as a first baseman, but the play was scored a hit, and it wasn't an indefensible decision. Ryan Garko followed with the third out of the inning.

That was Cleveland's baserunner (singular) in the first six innings.

In between, Bannister mixed ground balls with weak flies and a few Ks (not a Bannister hallmark) and generally made the Cleveland offense look supremely inept. It is cheap work to compare every right-handed pitcher who makes offenses look bad without obviously-superior stuff to Greg Maddux, and Bannister is not Greg Maddux primarily for the reason that no one else is, either, but ... well, he looked really, really good.

In the sixth, Bannister gave up a solid shot up the middle to Kelly Shoppach the struck him on his plant leg: at the time, this appeared to be just one of those things, but after a half inning of sitting and letting it swell, Bannister's theretofore pinpoint control deserted him for a single pitch to David Dellucci, who punished him with a 391-foot solo shot over the 390-foot marker in right center, and, with the way Lee was pitching, the ballgame essentially ended. He would go on to allow a second run on a pair of doubles, but through six innings, Bannister was one well-placed hop of perfect.

4) The highest of peaks, the lowest of valleys

How do I know that Ryan Garko is struggling at the plate? There are many ways to evaluate this: is he reaching to swing at pitches he can't hit? Is he pulling outside pitches to the shortstop? Is he in the midst of a long hitless streak, or one in which he frequently strikes out? I would submit that only one test need be applied: the Brett Tomko Test.

Consider this plate appearance against Tomko in the first:

Strike (foul), Ball, Ball, Strike (looking), Ball, Foul, Foul, Foul, Foul, Foul, Foul, Foul, groundout

In fact, Garko would face Tomko three times and collect a total of zero hits. He did reach base when Alex Gordon decided to test his telekinetic powers and field a ground ball entirely with theta waves instead of, say, his glove, but he got no hits. Why is this notable?

Because EVERY OTHER CLEVELAND INDIAN REACHED BASE OFF BRETT TOMKO.

And, I would submit, this is because HE IS BRETT TOMKO.

Tomko gave up a horrific 11 hits in 4 innings while walking two. Ben Francisco had two hits. Jason Michaels had an EXTRA-BASE hit. Asdrubal Cabrera took a brief break from his flirtation with the Mendoza line with a hit. EVERYONE hits Brett Tomko. And Ryan Garko ... fouled off eight pitches. That, my friends, is a struggling hitter. (Garko took an 0-for-9 collar on the night.)

5) Managerial Head-Scratchers

Jen Lewis got the call to bail out the struggling Fausto Carmona: he started Alberto Callaspo with two balls, but began

throwing strikes and got him to fly out to left. He got Tony Pena, Jr. to ground back to him for the second out. Then Joey Gathright hit a weak blooper that dropped between the infield and outfielder for a single. After an exhausting twelve pitches, on a night of a double-header, before heading back home to face the ultra-patient Yankees, on a night when saving arms was a priority, Jensen Lewis' night was done as the left-handed David DeJesus came to the plate.

Now, listen, I understand wanting to match up against DeJesus there, and Raffy Perez did retire him on three pitches, one of which was even a strike. DeJesus has a platoon split, and you'd rather the game stay a comfortable four-run lead than get to be a collar-tightening affair. But it's not like Lewis was getting bombed: Gathright's hit travelled no more rapidly than a Kenny Lofton lollipop from left to the plate. And Lewis isn't really the kind of righty who has trouble against the other side: in fact, in tiny samples, he's better against lefties this season. Last season he gave up a .652 OPS to righties ... and .542 to lefties. I'm not claiming he's got enough data to pronounce him a reverse split guy, but ... geez, pulling him there smacked of extreme orthodoxy.

6) The Mighty Bottom of the Order

In the first game, each of the 7-8-9 hitters collected two hits,

including doubles by Ben Francisco and Jason Michaels, and a two-out RBI single by Casey Blake with a RISP. They scored four of Cleveland's nine runs and drove in five of them (some of these runs overlap: they weren't "responsible" for all 9).

In the nightcap, no such thing occurred, but look, we got 5-hit. I'm not complaining. Andy Marte did lay down a nice sacrifice bunt, but this was as much a product of protecting his gonads as it was good hitting.

7) Adventures in ... wait, this must be a typo

In the second inning of the first game, Asdrubal Cabrera walked and tried to advance to third on a single to short left by Ben Francisco: only a truly remarkable play by Pena caught him at third. However, instead of simply watching the play, Francisco used the opportunity to take second base. This proved to be good, because Blake then drove him in. When the throw tried to get Francisco at the plate, Blake took second base. THIS proved to be good because when Grady Sizemore singled, Blake was able to score, and when the cutoff throw was poorly handled, SIZEMORE took second base. This proved to be a teapot tempest as Carroll grounded out, but look: on three consecutive plays, an Indians baserunner used heads-up play and good baserunning ... yes, *good baserunning* ... to get an

extra base ... which directly led to runs.

As a fan of the 2006 Cleveland Indians, this confused me greatly. I liked it, though.

8) New rule

When three men can reach out and mutually touch each other and a fly ball falls within a circle drawn through the midpoints of their abdomens, this will be considered a Bad Play.

9) Now auditioning for the role

With Raffy Betancourt saved for the ninth to record his first save on the season, someone needed to be ... well, Raffy Betancourt. You know, the guy who saws through the top or middle of the order in the 8th to set up the closer for the easy save. Last night, that guy was Masahide Kobayashi.

Kobayashi didn't look nearly as dominant, and appears to

believe he has an incentive clause in his contract giving him a bonus for retiring hitters on three-ball counts, but Koba needed only 16 pitches to record the last out of the 7th with men on first and second, and sawed through a perfect 8th on three groundouts, two directly to him on his glove side. That would be really excellent if that kind of performance isn't a mirage.

10) I am ready

For the damned infield singles to stop.

11) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro is negoatiating with the Royals to hire Tony Pena, Jr. as our new hitting coach. Since Pena is under contract, this statement is clearly untrue. Fire Cliff Lee's detractors.